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DISCOURSES AND DISCUSSIONS

IN

EXPLANATION AND DEFENCE

OF

UNITARIANISM.

By ORVILLE DEWEY,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH, IN NEW YORK.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Volume, here offered to the public, is designed to give a comprehensive reply to the question, — What is Unitarianism? No book, within the Author's knowledge, answers the purpose of a general summary of the views entertained by Unitarians, and of the arguments which may be adduced in their defence. Many persons, it is believed, have felt the want of something of this nature, — something beyond the brief compass of a Tract, and within the limits of a Volume, — which they could give or point out, to those who are asking, — “What are your general views of religion?”

What are your views of the Scriptures, — of faith in them, — and of the doctrines and principles which they teach ?” Such inquirers are often not sufficiently interested, to gather the information they seek, from scattered tracts, or to hunt for it, through twenty volumes ; nor, if they were, is it likely that the tracts or volumes would be within their reach. The present volume will perhaps satisfy the questions, that are already in their minds ; and if it raises questions which it does not settle, they must be referred to other sources. In particular, reference may be made, — on the Trinity, to Norton’s Statement of Reasons ; on the Offices of Christ, to Ware’s Discourses ; on the general subject, to Sparks’s Inquiry, Yates’s Vindication, and the Works of Channing ; and for our practical views of religion, to the Discourses of Freeman, Buckminster, Thatcher, Abbot, Parker, and

Cappe, besides those of many living writers.

One word further the Author may be permitted to say of the manner in which this volume is made up. It consists partly of discourses not before published, and partly of reprints of former publications. Of the latter kind are chiefly two series of papers, entitled "Cursory Observations on the Questions at issue between Orthodox and Liberal Christians;" and "The Analogy of Religion with other Subjects." The last has been entirely re-written, and the first altered and revised.

In short, the Author's purpose, in this volume, has been, in the first place, to offer a very brief summary of the Unitarian Belief; in the next place, to lay down the essential principles of all religious faith;

thirdly, to state and defend our construction, as it is generally held among us, of the Christian doctrines ; fourthly, to illustrate, by analogy, our views of practical religion ; and finally, in two closing sermons, to discuss the true proportion and harmony of the Christian character. With this brief statement the work is submitted to the reader.

New York, Dec. 2, 1839.

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DISCOURSES.

THE UNITARIAN BELIEF.

WE shall undertake to state in this article what we understand to be the prevailing belief of Unitarian Christians. Our position as a religious body seems still to require statements of this nature. It is a position, that is to say, entirely misunderstood. Misconstructions, once in vogue, seem to have a strange power of perpetuating themselves; or, at any rate, they are helped on by powers that seem to us very strange. In the face of a thousand denials, and in spite of the self-contradicting absurdity of the charge, it is still said, and, by multitudes, seems to be thought, that our creed consists of negations; that we believe in almost nothing. It seems to be received as if it were a matter of common consent, that we do not hold to the doctrines of the Bible, and that we scarcely pretend to hold to the Bible itself. It is apparently supposed by many, that we stand upon peculiar ground in this respect; that we hold some strange position in the Christian world, different from all other Christian denominations.

We must, therefore, if our patience fail not, explain ourselves again and again. We must, again and again, implore others to make distinctions very obvious indeed, but which they are strangely slow to see, — to distinguish, that is to say, or at least to remember that *we* distinguish, between the Bible and fallible interpretations, between Scripture doctrines and the explanations of those doctrines. The former we receive ; the latter only do we reject.

Our position in the Christian world is not a singular one. We profess to stand upon the same ground as all other Christians, — the Bible. Our position, considered as dissent, — our position, as assailed on all sides, is by no means a novel one. The Protestants were, and are, charged by the Romish Church with rejecting Christianity. Every sect in succession that has broken off from the body of Christians, the Lutherans and English Episcopalians first, then the Scotch Presbyterians, then the Baptists, the Methodists, the Quakers, the Puritans, the Independents of every name, have been obliged to reply to the same charge of holding no valid nor authorized belief. And what has been the answer of them all ? It has been the answer of Paul before Felix, — that they did believe ; that they “ believed all things that are written ” in the holy volume.

This same defence, namely, Paul’s defence to the Jews, Luther’s and Wickliffe’s to the Romish

Church, — the defence of Knox, of Robinson, of Fox, of Wesley, and Whitfield, and of our own Mayhew and Mathers to the English Church, — this same defence, it has fallen to our lot to plead as Unitarian Christians. We bear a new name; but we take an old stand, — a stand old as Christianity. We bear a new name, but we make an old defence; we think, as every other class of Christians have thought, that we approach the nearest to the old primitive Christianity. We bear a hard name, the name of heretics; but it is the very name which Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Arminians, Calvinists, have once borne, — which all Protestant Orthodoxy has once borne, — which Paul himself bore, when he said, “After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers.” We bear a new name; and a new name draws suspicion upon it, as every Christian sect has had occasion full well to know; and we think, therefore, that our position and our plea demand some consideration and sympathy from the body of Christians. We think that they ought to listen to us, when we make the plea, once their own, that we believe, according to our honest understanding of their import, all things that are written in the Holy Scriptures.

There is one circumstance which makes the statement of this defence peculiarly pertinent and proper for *us*. And that is, the delicacy which has been felt by our writers and preachers about

the use of terms. When we found, for instance, that the phrase, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," and that the words, *atonement, regeneration, election*, with some others, were appropriated by the popular creeds, and stood in prevailing usage, for orthodox doctrines, we hesitated about the free use of them. It was not because we hesitated about the meaning which Scripture gave to them, but about the meaning which common usage had fixed upon them. We believed in the things themselves, we believed in the words as they stood in the Bible, but not as they stood in other books. But finding that, whenever we used these terms, we were charged, as even our great Master himself was, with "deceiving the people," and not anxious to dispute about words, we gave up the familiar use of a portion of the Scriptural phraseology. Whether we ought, in justice to ourselves, so to have done, is not now the question. We did so; and the consequence has been, that the body of the people, not often hearing from our pulpits the contested words and phrases; not often hearing the words, *propitiation, sacrifice, the natural man, the new birth, and the Spirit of God*,—hold themselves doubly warranted in charging us with a defection from the faith of Scripture. It is this state of things, which makes it especially pertinent and proper for us, as we have said, distinctly to declare not only our belief in the Scriptures generally, but our belief in what

the Scriptures teach on the points in controversy, — our belief, we repeat, in what the Scriptures mean by the phrase, “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” and by the words, *atonement*, *conversion*, *election*, and others that stand for disputed doctrines.

To some statements of this nature, then, we now invite attention ; only premising further, that it is no part of our purpose, within the brief limits of this exposition, to set forth anything of that abundant argument for our views of Christianity, which so powerfully convinces us that they are true. Our object, at present, is limited to statement and explanation. We would present the Unitarian creed, according to our own understanding of it.

With this object in view, we say, in general, that we believe in the Scriptures.

On a point which is so plain, and ought to be so well understood as this, it is unnecessary to dwell, unless it be for the purpose of discrimination. If any one thinks it necessary to a reception of the Bible as a revelation from God, that the inspired penmen should have written by immediate dictation ; if he thinks that the writers were mere amanuenses, and that word after word was put down by instant suggestion from above ; that the very style is divine and not human ; that the style, we say, and the matters of style, — the figures, the metaphors, the illustrations, came from

the Divine mind, and not from human minds ; we say, at once and plainly, that we do not regard the Scriptures as setting forth any claims to such supernatural perfection or accuracy of style. It is not a kind of distinction, that would add anything to the authority, much less to the dignity, of a communication from heaven. Nay, it would detract from its power, to deprive it, by any hypothesis, of those touches of nature, of that natural pathos, simplicity, and imagination, and of that solemn grandeur of thought, disregarding style, of which the Bible is full. Enough is it for us, that the matter is divine, the doctrines true, the history authentic, the miracles real, the promises glorious, the threatenings fearful. Enough, that all is gloriously and fearfully true,—true to the Divine will, true to human nature, true to its wants, anxieties, sorrows, sins, and solemn destinies. Enough, that the seal of a divine and miraculous communication is set upon that Holy Book.

So we receive it. So we believe in it. And there is many a record on those inspired pages, which he who believes therein would not exchange,—no, he would not exchange it, a simple sentence though it be, for the wealth of worlds.

That God Almighty, the Infinite Creator and Father, hath spoken to the world ; that He who speaks indeed, in all the voices of nature and life, but speaks there generally and leaves all to in-

ference,—that he hath spoken to man distinctly, and as it were individually,—spoken with a voice of interpretation for life's mysteries, and of guidance amidst its errors, and of comfort for its sorrows, and of pardon for its sins, and of hope, undying hope, beyond the grave ; — this is a fact, compared with which all other facts are not worth believing in ; this is an event, so interesting, so transcendent, transporting, sublime, as to leave to all other events the character only of things ordinary and indifferent.

But let us pass from the general truth of this record to some of its particular doctrines. Our attention here will be confined to the New Testament.

I. And we say, in the first place, that we believe “in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost.” This was the simple primitive creed of the Christians ; and it were well if men had been content to receive it in its simplicity. As a creed, it was directed to be introduced into the form of baptism. The rite of baptism was appropriated to the profession of Christianity. The converts were to be baptized into the acknowledgment of the Christian religion ; “baptized into the name,” that is, into the acknowledgment, “of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

This creed consists of three parts. It contains no proof, nor hint, of the doctrine of a Trinity. We might as well say, that any other three points

of belief are one point. The creed consists of three parts ; and these parts embrace the grand peculiarities of the Christian religion ; and it is for this reason, as we conceive, and for no other, that they are introduced into the primitive form of a profession of Christianity.

The first tenet is, that God is a paternal Being ; that he has an interest in his creatures, such as is expressed in the title *Father* ; an interest unknown to all the systems of Paganism, untaught in all the theories of philosophy ; an interest not only in the glorious beings of other spheres, the sons of light, the dwellers in heavenly worlds, but in us, poor, ignorant, and unworthy as we are ; that he has pity for the erring, pardon for the guilty, love for the pure, kindness for the humble, and promises of immortal and blessed life for those who trust and obey him. God, — yes, the God of boundless worlds and infinite systems, is our Father. How many, in Christian lands, have not yet learned this first truth of the Christian faith !

The second article in the Christian's creed is, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person ; not God himself, but his image, his brightest manifestation ; the teacher of his truth, the messenger of his will ; the mediator between God and men ; the sacrifice for sin, and the Saviour from it ; the conqueror of death, the forerunner into eternity, where he evermore liveth to make inter-

cession for us. We are not about to argue ; but we cannot help remarking, as we pass, how obvious it is, that in none of these offices can Jesus be regarded as God. If he *is* God in his *nature*, yet as Mediator between God and man, we say he cannot be *regarded* as God.

The third object of our belief, introduced into the primitive creed, is the Holy Ghost ; in other words, that power of God, that divine influence, by which Christianity was established through miraculous aids, and by which its spirit is still shed abroad in the hearts of men. This tenet, as we understand it, requires our belief in miracles, and in gracious interpositions of God, for the support and triumph of Christian faith and virtue.

Let us add, that these three, with the addition of the doctrine of a future life, are the grand points of faith which are set forth in the earliest uninspired creed on record ; commonly called "The Apostles' Creed." Its language is, "I believe in God the Father Almighty ; and in Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son, our Lord ; who was born of the Holy Ghost and Virgin Mary ; and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was buried ; and, the third day, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of the Father ; whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead ; and in the Holy Ghost ; the Holy Church ; the remission of sins ; and the resurrection of the flesh." Not a word here of "co-

equal Son," as in the Nicene Creed ; not a word of " Trinity," as in the Athanasian. Things approach nearer, it should seem, to the simplicity of the Gospel, as they approach nearer to its date. To that simplicity of faith, then, we hold fast. On that primitive and beautiful record of doctrine we put our hand and place our reliance. We believe "in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost." May the Father Almighty have mercy upon us ! May the Son of God redeem us from guilt, from misery, and from hell ! May the Holy Ghost sanctify and save us !

From this general creed, let us now proceed to particular doctrines.

II. We believe in the atonement. That is to say, we believe in what that word, and similar words, mean, in the New Testament. We take not the responsibility of supporting the popular interpretations. They are various, and are constantly varying, and are without authority, as much as they are without uniformity and consistency. What the divine record says, we believe according to the best understanding we can form of its import. We believe that Jesus Christ "died for our sins ;" that he "died, the just for the unjust ;" that "he gave his life a ransom for many ;" that "he is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world ;" that "we have redemption through his blood ;" that we "have access to God, and enter into the holiest, that is, the nearest com-

munion with God, by the blood of Jesus." We have no objection to the phrase "atoning blood," though it is not Scriptural, provided it is taken in a sense which the Scripture authorizes.

But what now is the meaning of all this phraseology, and of much more that is like it? Certainly it is, that there is some connexion between the sufferings of Christ, and our forgiveness, our redemption from sin and misery. This we all believe. But what *is* this connexion? Here is all the difficulty; here is all the difference of opinion. We all believe, all Christians believe, that the death of Christ is a means of our salvation. But how is it a means? Was it, — some one will say, perhaps, as if he were putting us to the test, — was it an atonement, a sacrifice, a propitiation? We answer, that it was an atonement, a sacrifice, a propitiation. But now the question is, *what is* an atonement, a sacrifice, a propitiation? And this is the difficult question, — a question, to the proper solution of which much thought, much cautious discrimination, much criticism, much knowledge, and especially of the ancient Hebrew sacrifices, is necessary. Can we not "receive the atonement," without this knowledge, this criticism, this deep philosophy? What then is to become of the mass of mankind, of the body of Christians? Can we not savingly "receive the atonement," unless we adopt some particular explanation, some peculiar creed, concerning it?

Who will dare to answer this question in the negative, when he knows that the Christian world, the Orthodox Christian world, is filled with differences of opinion concerning it? The Presbyterian Church of America is, at this moment, rent asunder on this question. Christians are, everywhere, divided on the questions, whether the redemption is particular or general, whether the sufferings of Christ were a literal endurance of the punishment due to sin, or only a moral equivalent, and whether this equivalency, supposing this to be the true explanation, consists in the endurance of God's displeasure against sin, or only in a simple scenic manifestation of it.

The atonement is one thing; the gracious interposition of Christ in our behalf; the doing of all that was necessary to be done, to provide the means and the way for our salvation, — this is one thing; in this we all believe. The philosophy, the theory, the theology (so to speak) of the atonement, is another thing. About this, Orthodox Christians are differing with one another, about as much as they are differing from us. Nay, more, they are saying as hard things of one another as they ever said of us. Is it not time to learn wisdom? Is there not good reason for taking the ground we do, — the ground, that is to say, of general belief and trust, without insisting upon particular and peculiar explanations?

We believe in Christ, — and well were it if

we all believed in him too fervently and tenderly to be engaged much in theological disputes and denunciations. We believe in Christ. We pray to God through him. We ask God to bless us for his sake, for we feel that Christ makes intercession, and has obtained the privilege to be heard, through his own meritorious sufferings. Christ's sacrifice is the grandest, the most powerful means of salvation. It was a transcendent and most affecting example of meekness, patience, and forgiveness of injuries. It was a most striking exhibition of God's gracious interest and concern for us, of his view of the evil and curse of sin, and of his compassion for the guilty, and of his readiness to forgive the penitent. It was an atonement, — that is to say, a means of reconciliation, — reconciliation not of God to us, but of us to God. The blood of that sacrifice was atoning blood ; that is, it was blood, on which whoever looks rightly, is touched with gratitude, and humility, and sorrow for his sins, and thus is reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

Now it is possible that we do not understand and receive all that is meant by the Scriptures on this subject. We admit it, as what imperfection ought always to admit ; but we admit it, too, for the sake of saying, that, so long as we receive all that we can understand from the language in question ; so long as we receive and believe every word that is written ; no man has a right to say to us,

without qualification, "You do not believe in the atonement." He may say, "You do not believe in the atonement according to my explanation, or according to Calvin's explanation;" but he has no right to say, without qualification, "You do not believe in that doctrine; you do not believe in the propitiation, in the reconciliation, in the sacrifice of Jesus;" no more right, than we have to address the same language to him.*

* In an Introductory Essay to Butler's Analogy, published by a leading defender of what is called the New Divinity in the Presbyterian Church, the author says, "We maintain that the system of Unitarians, which denies all such substitution,"—meaning the removal of calamities from us, in ordinary life, by the interposition and suffering of another,—"is a violation of all the modes in which God has yet dispensed his blessings to man." We may just observe in passing, that the respectable author would not say, on reflection, "of *all* the modes;" for many of the most momentous blessings are dispensed to us through our own agency. But this is what he would say, that the Unitarian belief, with regard to the atonement, violates, as he conceives, one great principle of the divine beneficence. And that is the principle, that blessings are often conferred on us, in the course of Providence, through the instrumentality of others,—of parents, friends, fellow beings, &c. "It is by years of patient toil in others," says Mr. Barnes, in this Essay, "that we possess the elements of science, the principles of morals, the endowments of religion." "Over a helpless babe,—ushered into the world, naked, feeble, speechless, there impends hunger, cold, sickness, sudden death,—a mother's watchfulness averts these evils. Over a nation impend revolutions, sword, famine, and the pestilence. The blood of the patriot averts these, and the nation smiles in peace." It

We believe then in the atonement. We believe in other views of this great subject, than those which are expressed by the word *atonement*. But this word spreads before our minds a truth of inexpressible interest. The reconciliation by Je-

is true that the author does "not affirm that this is *all* that is meant by an atonement," and herein we entirely agree with him. But he certainly is mistaken, when he says, that Unitarians deny all such substitution. We deny the Calvinistic explanation of atonement or substitution. We might reject the author's hypothesis too, if we knew what it was. But does it follow, that we deny all substitution? On the contrary, we especially hold to such substitution.

If all reputed belief in the atonement is to depend on receiving one particular explanation of it, where is this to end? The party in the Presbyterian Church which strictly adheres to their standards, that is, to the genuine old Calvinistic theology, charges Mr. Barnes and his friends, and the body of New England Divines, with holding "another gospel." These again charge Dr. Taylor and the New Haven School with holding "another gospel." Meanwhile, each of these bodies very stoutly defends its position, insists upon its adherence to Christianity, and protests against the sentence of excision. Has either of these parties obtained a monopoly in protestation and profession? Are liberality and candor to stop with each party, just where its convenience may dictate? Have they needed charity so much, that they have used it all up? Is the last chance of a candid and kind construction gone by? and is nobody ever to be permitted any more to say, "We believe in the Gospel, though not according to your explanation?"

There are, perhaps, no more accredited defenders of the popular doctrine of the atonement than Andrew Fuller and Bishop Magee. Fuller, as quoted by Evans in his "Sketch," says "If we say, a way was opened by *the death of Christ*, for the

us Christ, his interposition to bring us nigh to God, is to us his grandest office. To our minds there is no sentence of the holy volume more interesting, more weighty, more precious, than that passage in the sublime Epistle to the Ephesians, "Ye were strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world; but now in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometime were far off, are brought nigh by the blood of Christ." It is this which the world needed; it is this which every mind now needs, beyond all things, — to be brought nigh to God. By error, by superstition and sin, by slavish fears and guilty passions, and wicked ways, we were separated from him. By a gracious mission from the Father, by simple and clear instructions, by encouraging representations of God's paternal love and pity, by winning examples of the transcendent beauty of goodness,

free and consistent exercise of mercy in all the methods which sovereign wisdom saw fit to adopt, perhaps we shall include every material idea which the Scriptures give us of that important event." — *Evans*, p. 120, 14th Edition.

To the question, "In what way can the death of Christ be conceived to operate to the remission of sins?" Magee says, "The answer of the Christian is, I know not, nor does it concern me to know, *in what manner* the sacrifice of Christ is connected with the forgiveness of sins; it is enough that this is declared by God to be the medium through which my salvation is effected." — *Magee on the Atonement*, p. 29, American Edition.

With these declarations we entirely agree.

and, most of all, by that grand consummation, **DEATH**, by that exhibition of the curse of sin, in which Jesus was made a curse for it, by that compassion of the Holy One, which flowed forth in every bleeding wound, by that voice for ever sounding through the world, "Father! Father! forgive them," Jesus has brought us nigh to God. Can it be thought enthusiasm to say, that there is no blessing, either in possession or in the range of possibility, to be compared with this? Does not reason itself declare, that all the harmonies of moral existence are broken, if the great, central, all-attracting Power, be not acknowledged and felt? Without God,—to every mind that has awaked to the consciousness of its nature,—without God, life is miserable; the world is dark; the universe is disrobed of its splendors; the intellectual tie to nature is broken; the charm of existence is dissolved; the great hope of being is lost; and the mind itself, like a star struck from its sphere, wanders through the infinite region of its conceptions, without attraction, tendency, destiny, or end. "Without God in the world!"—what a comprehensive and desolating sentence of exclusion is written in those few words! "Without God in the world!" It is to be without the presence of the Creator amidst his works, of the Father amidst his family, of the Being who has spread gladness and beauty all around us. It is to be without spiritual light, without any sure

guidance or strong reliance, without any adequate object for our ever expanding love, without any sufficient consoler for our deepest sorrows, without any protector when the world joins against us, without any refuge when persecution pursues us to death, without any all-controlling principle, without the chief sanction of duty, without the great bond of existence. Oh! dark and fearful in spirit must we be, poor tremblers upon a bleak and desolate creation, deserted, despairing, miserable must we be, if the Power that controls the universe is not our friend, if God be nothing to us but a mighty and dread abstraction to which we never come near; if God be not "*our* God, and our exceeding great reward for ever!" This is the fearful doom that is reversed in the gospel of Christ. This is the fearful condition from which it was his great design to deliver us. For this end it was that he died, that he might bring us nigh to God. The blood of martyrdom is precious; but this was the blood of a holier sacrifice, of innocence pleading for guilt, "of a lamb without spot and without blemish, slain from the foundation of the world."

But we must pass to other topics, and the space that remains will oblige us to give them severally much less expansion in this brief statement.

III. In the third place, then, we say, that we believe in human depravity; and a very serious and saddening belief it is, too, that we hold on this

point. We believe in the very great depravity of mankind, in the exceeding depravation of human nature. We believe that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." We believe all that is meant, when it is said of the world in the time of Noah, that "all the imaginations of men, and all the thoughts of their hearts were evil, and only evil continually." We believe all that Paul meant, when he said, speaking of the general character of the heathen world in his time, "There is none that is righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God; they have all gone out of the way, there is none that doeth good, or is a doer of good, no, not one; with their tongues they use deceit, and the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; and the way of peace have they not known, and there is no fear of God before their eyes." We believe that this was not intended to be taken without qualifications, for Paul, as we shall soon have occasion to observe, made qualifications. It was true in the general. But it is not the ancient heathen world alone, that we regard as filled with evil. We believe that the world now, taken in the mass, is a very, a *very* bad world; that the sinfulness of the world is dreadful and horrible to consider; that the nations ought to be covered with sackcloth and mourning for it; that they are filled with misery by it. Why,

can any man look abroad upon the countless miseries inflicted by selfishness, dishonesty, slander, strife, war; upon the boundless woes of intemperance, libertinism, gambling, crime, — can any man look upon all this, with the thousand minor diversities and shadings of guilt and guilty sorrow, and feel that he could write any less dreadful sentence against the world than Paul has written? Not believe in human depravity, great, general, dreadful depravity! — Why, a man must be a fool, nay, a stock or a stone, not to believe in it! He has no eyes, he has no senses, he has no perceptions, if he refuses to believe in it!

But let the reader of this exposition take with him these qualifications; for although it is popular, strangely popular, to speak extravagantly of human wickedness, we shall not endeavor to gain any man's good opinion by that means.

First, it is not the depravity of *nature*, in which we believe. Human nature, nature as it exists in the bosom of an infant, is nothing else but capability; capability of good as well as evil, though more likely from its exposures, to be evil than good. It is not the depravity, then, but the depravation of nature, in which we believe.

Secondly, it is not in the unlimited application of Paul's language, that we believe. When he said, "No, not one," he did not mean to say, without qualification, that there was not one good man in the world. He believed that there *were*

good men. He did not mean to say, that there was not one good man in the *heathen* world ; for he speaks in another place, of those, who, "not having the law, were a law to themselves, and by nature *did* those things which are written in the law." Paul meant, doubtless, to say, that the world is a very bad world, and in this we believe.

Neither, thirdly, do we believe in what is technically called, "total depravity ;" that is to say, a total and absolute destitution of every thing right, even in bad men. No such critical accuracy do we believe that the Apostle ever affected, or ever thought of affecting. A very bad child may sometimes love his parents, and be melted into great tenderness toward them ; and so a mind estranged from God, may sometimes tenderly feel his goodness.

Finally, we would not portray human wickedness without the deepest consideration and pity for it. Alas ! how badly is man educated, how sadly is he deluded, how ignorant is he of himself, how little does he perceive the great love of God to him, which, if he were rightly taught to see it, might melt him into tenderness and penitence. Let us have some patience with human nature till it is less cruelly abused ! Let us pity the sad and dark struggle that is passing in many hearts, between good and evil ; and, though evil so often gains the ascendancy, still let us pity, while we blame it ; and while we speak to it in the solemn

language of reprobation and warning, let us "tell these things," as Paul did, "even weeping."

IV. From this depraved condition, we believe, in the fourth place, that men are to be recovered, by a process which is termed, in the Scriptures, regeneration. We believe in regeneration, or the new birth. That is to say, we believe, not in all the ideas which men have annexed to those words, but in what we understand the sacred writers to mean by them. We believe that, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" that "he must be new created in Christ Jesus," that "old things must pass away and all things become new." We certainly think that these phrases applied with peculiar force to the condition of people, who were not only to be converted from their sins, but from the very forms of religion in which they had been brought up; and we know indeed that the phrase "new birth" did, according to the usage of language in those days, apply especially to the bare fact of proselytism. But we believe that men are still to be converted from their sins, and that this is a change of the most urgent necessity, and of the most unspeakable importance.

The application of this doctrine, too, is nearly universal. Some, like Samuel of old, may have grown up to piety from their earliest childhood, and it may be hoped that the number of such, through the means of more faithful education, is

increasing. But we confess that we understand nothing of that romantic dream of the innocence of childhood. There are few children who do not need to be "converted," — from selfishness to disinterestedness, from the sullenness or violence of crossed passions to meekness and submission, from the dislike to the love of piety and pious exercises ; from the habits of a sensual, to the efforts of a rational and spiritual nature. Childhood is, indeed, often pure, compared with what commonly follows, but still it needs a change. And that, which does commonly follow, is a character which needs to be essentially changed, in order to prepare the soul for happiness in heaven.

Now there is usually a time in the life of every devoted Christian when this change commences. We say not, a moment ; for it is impossible so to date moral experiences. But there is a time, when the work is resolutely begun. Begun, we say ; for it cannot in any brief space be completed. How soon it may be so far completed, as to entitle its subject to hope for future happiness, it is neither easy, nor material, to say. But to aver that it may be done in a moment, is a doctrine of which it is difficult to say whether it is, in our view, more unscriptural, extravagant, or dangerous.

With such qualifications and guards, authorized by the laws of sound criticism, we believe in regeneration ; and we believe that the spirit of God

is offered to aid, in this great work, the weakness of human endeavor.

V. We believe, too, in the fifth place, in the doctrine of election. That is to say, again, we believe in what the Scriptures, as we understand them, mean by that word.

The time has been, when, not the intrinsic importance of this doctrine, but the stress laid upon it, would have required that we should give it considerable space in this summary view. Our good old Arminian fathers fought with it for many a weary day. It was the great stumblingblock in the way of the last generation. And, during our time, it has been held, firmly and by many hands, in its place, as one of the essential foundations of faith. But, within a few years past, it has come to be almost entirely overlooked ; many preachers have almost ceased to direct attention to it ; and many hearers are left to wonder what has become of it, and why it ever occupied a situation so conspicuous. Would that the history of it might be a lesson !

The truth is, that the doctrine of election is a matter either of scholastic subtilty or of presumptuous curiosity, with which, as we apprehend, we have but very little to do. Secret things belong to God. We believe in what the Bible teaches of God's infinite and eternal foreknowledge. We believe that, of all the events and actions, which take place in the universe of worlds, and the eter-

nal succession of ages, there is not one, not the minutest, which God did not for ever foresee, with all the distinctness of immediate vision. It is a sublime truth. But it is a truth, which the moment we undertake to analyze and apply, we are confounded in ignorance, and lost in wonder. We believe, but we would take care that we do not presumptuously believe. We believe in election, not in selection. We believe in foreknowledge, not in fate. We believe in the boundless wisdom of God, but not less in the weakness of our own comprehension. We believe that his thoughts are not as our thoughts, and that his ways are not as our ways, and his counsels are not as our counsels, and his decrees are not as our decrees. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so is he above the reach of our frail and finite understanding.

VI. In the sixth place, we believe in a future state of rewards and punishments. We believe that sin must ever produce misery, and that holiness must ever produce happiness. We believe that there is good for the good, and evil for the evil; and that these are to be dispensed exactly in proportion to the degree in which the good or evil qualities prevail.

The language of Scripture, and all the language of Scripture on this solemn subject, we have no hesitation about using, in the sense in which it was originally meant to be understood. But there

has been that attempt to give definiteness to the indefinite language of the Bible on this subject, to measure the precise extent of those words which spread the vastness of the unknown futurity before us; and with this system of artificial criticism, the popular ignorance of Oriental figures and metaphors has so combined to fix a specific meaning on the phraseology in question, that it is difficult to use it without constant explanation. "Life everlasting," and "everlasting fire;" the mansions of rest, and the worm that never dieth, are phrases fraught with a just and reasonable, but, at the same time, vast and indefinite import. They are too obviously figurative to permit us to found definite and literal statements upon them. And it is especially true of those figures and phrases that are used to describe future misery, that there is not one which is not also used in the Bible to describe things earthly, limited, and temporary.

So confident in their opinions are men made by education and the current belief, that they can scarcely think it possible that the words of Scripture should have any other meaning than that which they assign to them. And they are ready, and actually feel as if they had a right, to ask those who differ from them to give up the Bible altogether. Nay, they go so far sometimes, as to aver, in the honesty and blindness of their prejudices, that their opponents have given up the

Bible, and have given up all thoughts of trying the questions at issue by that standard. We have an equal right certainly to return the exhortation and to retort the charge. At any rate, we can accept neither. We believe in the Scriptures, as heartily as any others, and, as we think, more justly. We believe in all that they teach on this subject, and in all they teach on any subject.

We believe, then, in a heaven and a hell. We believe that there is more to be feared hereafter than any man ever feared, and more to be hoped than any man ever hoped. We believe that heaven is more glorious, and that hell is more dreadful, than any man ever conceived. We believe that the consequences both in this world and another,—that the consequences to every man, of any evil habits he forms, whether of feeling or action, run far beyond his most fearful anticipations. Are mankind yet so gross in their conceptions, that outward images convey the most transporting ideas they have of happiness, and the most tremendous ideas they have of misery? Is a celestial city all that they understand by heaven? Let them know that there is a heaven of the mind, a heaven of tried and confirmed virtue, a heaven of holy contemplation, so rapturous, that all ideas of place are transcended, are almost forgotten in its ecstasy. Is a world of elemental fires and bodily torments, all that they understand by hell? Let them consider, that a hell of the mind, the

hell of an inwardly gnawing and burning conscience, the hell of remorse and mental agony, may be more horrible than fire, and brimstone, and the blackness of darkness for ever! Yes, the crushing mountains, the folding darkness, the consuming fire might be welcomed, if they could bury, or hide, or sear the guilty and agonized passions, which, while they live, must for ever and for ever burn, and blacken, and blast the soul,—which, while they live, must for ever and for ever crush it down to untold and unutterable misery.

VII. Once more, and finally ; we believe in the supreme and all-absorbing importance of religion.

There is nothing more astonishing to us, than the freedom of language which we sometimes hear used, on this subject ; the bold and confident tone with which it is said that there is no religion among us, nothing but flimsy and fine sentiment, passing under the name of religion. We are ready to ask, what *is* religion in the hearts of men, what are its sources and fountains, when they can so easily deny it to the hearts of others? We are inclined to use no severity of retort, on this affecting theme ; else the observation of life might furnish us with some trying questions for the uncharitable to consider. But we will only express the simple astonishment we feel at such treatment. We will only say again, and say it more in wonder than in anger — what must religion be in others, what can be its kindness, and tenderness, and

peace, and preciousness, when they are so ready to rise up from its blessed affections, to the denial of its existence in the hearts of their brethren ?

We repeat, then, that we believe in the supreme and all-absorbing importance of religion. "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" is to us the most undeniable of all arguments ; "What shall I do to be saved ?" the most reasonable and momentous of all questions ; "God be merciful to me, a sinner !" the most affecting of all prayers. The soul's concern is the great concern. The interests of experimental, vital, practical religion are the great interests of our being. No language can be too strong, — no language can be strong enough, to give them due expression. No anxiety is too deep, no care too heedful, no effort too earnest, no prayer too importunate, to be bestowed upon this almost infinite concern of the soul's purification, piety, virtue, and welfare. No labor of life should be undertaken, no journey pursued, no business transacted, no pleasure enjoyed, no activity employed, no rest indulged in, without ultimate reference to that great end of our being. Without it, life has no sufficient object, and death has no hope, and eternity no promise.

What more shall we say ? Look at it, — look at this inward being, and say — what is it ? Formed by the Almighty hand, and therefore formed for some purpose ; built up in its proportions,

fashioned in every part, by infinite skill; an emanation, breathed from the spirit of God, — say, what is it? Its nature, its necessity, its design, its destiny, — what is it? So formed it is, so builded, so fashioned, so exactly balanced, and so exquisitely touched in every part, that sin introduced into it, is the direst misery; that every unholy thought falls upon it as a drop of poison; that every guilty desire, breathing upon every delicate part and fibre of the soul, is the plague-spot of evil, the blight of death. Made, then, is it for virtue, not for sin, — oh! not for sin, for that is death; but made for virtue, for purity, as its end, its rest, its bliss; made thus by God Almighty.

Thou canst not alter it. Go, and bid the mountainwalls sink down to the level of the valleys; go and stand upon the seashore and turn back its swelling waves; or stretch forth thy hand, and hold the stars in their courses; but not more vain shall be thy power to change them, than it is to change one of the laws of thy nature. *Then thou must be virtuous.* As true it is, as if the whole universe spoke in one voice, *thou must be virtuous.* If thou art a sinner, thou “must be born again.” If thou art tempted, thou must resist. If thou hast guilty passions, thou must deny them. If thou art a bad man, thou must be a good man.

There is the law. It is not our law; it is not our voice that speaks. It is the law of God Al-

mighty ; it is the voice of God that speaks,— speaks through every nerve and fibre, through every power and element of that moral constitution which he has given. It is the voice, not of an arbitrary will, nor of some stern and impracticable law, that is now abrogated. For the *grace* of God, that hath appeared to all men, teaches, that, denying all ungodliness and every worldly lust, they must live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present evil world. So let us live ; and then this life, with all its momentous scenes, its moving experiences, and its precious interests, shall be but the beginning of the wonders, and glories, and joys of our existence. So let us live ; and let us think this, that to live thus, is the great, urgent, instant, unutterable, all-absorbing concern of our life and of our being.

DISCOURSE

ON THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF ; WITH INFERENCES CONCERNING DOUBT, DECISION, CONFIDENCE, AND THE TRIAL OF FAITH.

I. COR. XIII. 12. — NOW I KNOW IN PART.

It is of some importance — I think it is of no little importance — that we should entertain just ideas of the nature of religious belief. To this subject therefore, and especially with a view to consider some difficulties and to meet some practical questions, I wish, at present, to invite your attention.

In the first place, then, it may be observed in general, that religious belief is essentially of the same nature as moral belief. In form, they differ, but in substance, they are the same. The common distinction between Religion and Morals, as totally different things, is as erroneous in principle as it is injurious in its effects. Both have their root in the same great original sense of rectitude, which God has impressed on our nature ; and without which we should not be men. By religion, we mean our duty to God ; and by morals, our duty to men : and both are bound upon us

by the same essential reason — that they are right. Or they are respectively, the love of God and the love of men; and both, in their highest character, are a love of the same goodness. Piety and philanthropy are essentially of the same nature. The Bible appeals to both alike, and it does not sever, but it binds them together; summing up all its commandments in these two — “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself:” and saying emphatically, “he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how doth he love God whom he hath not seen!”

Further; as the original grounds of conviction, so the steps by which we arrive at our conclusions in both of these spheres of duty, are essentially the same. The steps are steps of reasoning. The Bible teaches morals and religion alike, and teaches them in the same way; and we arrive at its meaning in both, by the same means — viz. by that process of reasoning, called criticism. There is not one kind of criticism to be applied to those texts which teach the love of God, and another to those which teach the love of man; there is the same process of reasoning in both cases. And so in Natural Theology, and Moral Philosophy, alike, we begin with certain original truths in the mind, and proceed to deduce certain duties; and in both cases, the process of reasoning is, in kind, the same.

But now the material question, and that to which I have been endeavoring to bring you, is this; *what* kind of reasoning is it? And the answer is plain; it is that kind of reasoning which is usually called moral reasoning. It is commonly defined, simply by being distinguished from mathematical reasoning. That is to say, it is not like a mathematical deduction, infallible; it is not attended with a feeling of certainty, but only of belief.

But still we must distinguish; for it is important to observe that the difference of which we speak relates only to *deductions* — not at all to *principles*. The original *principles* of religion and morals are certain. They are as certain as any other principles; as certain as the principles on which mathematical science is founded. They are not matters of belief at all, but matters of absolute knowledge. Though not in religious belief accurately speaking, yet in religion, there are absolute certainties. I am as sure that I have a conscience and a religious nature; I am as sure again, that benevolence and other moral qualities are right; and I am as sure that my nature is constituted to approve and love them, wherever they appear — in man or in God; as I am of my own existence and identity, or as I am that my nature is constituted to assent to the truth of any mathematical axioms. It is important to say this, because the distinction commonly made between

mathematical and moral reasonings, may be carelessly extended, so as to cover more ground than belongs to it. For the basis of the mathematics is not more certain and irrefragable, than the basis of morals.

But the moment we take one step from that basis, from those first principles, and enter upon deductions, it is agreed by all reasoners, that a marked and essential difference obtains. In the mathematics, every step of the deduction is as certain as the principle from which it started. In moral reasonings, it is not so. The ideas, involved in these reasonings, are not so definite, the terms not so clear, and the result is, by no means, so unerring. The steps of moral deduction, of philological criticism, are not steps of demonstration. But these are the steps that lead to religious belief—that conduct to a creed. A creed is not a certainty, but a belief. Put any certainty into a creed, and the absurdity would at once be felt. No one could gravely stand up and say, “I believe in my own existence; I believe in my identity; I believe that I ought to be a good man.” These are matters of certainty; but the propositions of a creed are matters of logical inference. The seal upon it is not absolute consciousness, but religious conviction. The scale, on which that conviction is marked, is the scale of probability. I use this term, probability, I ought to say, in the technical sense which moral reasoners assign to it,

which is stronger, and more definite than the popular sense. I use it as simply opposed to certainty. On the scale of probability, or of moral reasoning, in other words, belief often rises, no doubt, almost to certainty. But it never, strictly speaking, arrives at that point. It is never absolute certainty ; it is never perfect knowledge. For " we know in part," says the Apostle.

From these views, I am not aware that any intelligent moral or religious reasoners dissent. The distinction is familiar in all the standard writers, and may be considered as the settled judgment of all who are competent to form an opinion on the subject. Moral evidence is not demonstration. Belief is not knowledge. Believing a thing to be true is not knowing it to be true.

Not to dwell longer, then, upon a point so plain, and so universally conceded, my further purpose is to offer some remarks upon this admitted nature of religious belief.

I. My first remark is, if the view presented be just, that it is common to assign, in some respects, a very injurious and unwarrantable importance to doubts.

Doubts enter into the very processes by which we arrive at belief. Nay, they enter into the very nature of belief itself. They constitute a part of it, by very definition. Believing is doubting, to a certain extent. Believing and doubting are correlative terms. They are coessential elements.

"We know in part." That is to say, our knowledge is imperfect. But imperfect knowledge implies uncertainty. And uncertainty is doubt.

But the prevalent feeling and policy of the Christian world has been, to beat down and destroy doubts. It has given them no quarter. It has allowed them no place in the theory of its creeds, though those creeds have begun with the phrase "I believe" — not "I know," but "I believe." And this tendency of the public opinion and practice of the churches has had the effect, I wish it may be considered, to give not only an unwarrantable, but a most injurious importance to doubts. Its effect has been, not only to rend the bosom of the church, to cast out many honest and virtuous men from it, to make a new sect for every new doubt, but, I fear, to make many, who might have been preserved from that result, infidels. Doubt, I say, has derived a factitious importance, from this universal persecution. That portion of evidence, which leads a man to doubt, has been held by him to deserve more attention, than that which leads him to believe. One fraction of doubt has weighed with him more than nine parts of evidence in favor of Christianity, and he has become an unbeliever, we may say, against his own convictions. It is an independent and honest mind, too—which makes the case a more unfortunate one—that is especially liable to be carried away by this fallacy. Such an one, afraid of every

thing implicit and traditional in faith, says, "I have a doubt; I must be fair and impartial; I must be true to my convictions; I must assent to nothing from fear or favor; *I have a doubt*," this man says, "and how can I say I believe, so long as I doubt?" But why, let me ask in turn, should he pay this sort of homage to a mere negative conviction? What is there in a doubt—that is to say, what is there in a reason *against*, that is to be treated with so much more consideration, than in a reason *for*? Why should not this man say, though he may *not* feel that the argument is perfectly satisfactory, though he *may* be troubled with doubts,—why should he not say, "I have twice as much evidence for the Bible and a future life, as I have against them, and how can I *doubt* so long as I have that evidence?" I am sure this conclusion would be twice as rational as the other; and I am certain, that the spirit of this conclusion would have saved many from unbelief. But we do not ask so much as we have asked, in form, and by way of rejoinder. We do not ask, we have no right, as advocates or apologists for Christianity, to ask the man who hesitates, to say that he has *no* doubts; but we do ask, and have, in reason, a right to ask, that he should yield his mind, not to any assumed power or importance of doubt, but to the preponderance of evidence.

Beside the doubt about Christianity, there is

another which may be considered as a part of it, but which, I think, demands a distinct notice ; and that is, the doubt about a future life. This is a doubt which is much more frequently felt, than expressed. You will always observe when it is expressed, that it is done with great reluctance and caution, with a feeling almost as if a crime were confessed ; and with a feeling too, as if the matter of the confession were quite as peculiar to the individual confessing, as it is painful to him.

Now the difficulty here arises from our not sufficiently considering the nature of moral evidence — the nature of religious belief. It would relieve us, to be at once more frank and rational, instead of wrapping up the matter like a dark secret, in the cloud of our speculative misapprehensions. The truth is, that, in doubt on this point, there *is* nothing very strange. It belongs to more minds than you may imagine. It must belong, more or less, to all minds. It enters into the very nature of our belief in a future state.

× For that belief is not certainty. The point in question is not the subject of intuition. No man ever saw the world of departed spirits. All the views and convictions, that any man has or can have about it, fall short of actual knowledge. We believe, indeed, in the divine mission of Christ. We believe, too, in the mercy of God, and should entertain some hope of a future life, even on the general ground of natural Theology. We see

not, moreover, how the scene of this life can be cleared up, how the great plan of things can be made consistent or tolerable, without a future scene. And on all these accounts we have a strong faith in futurity. But to say that this faith has passed beyond every shadow of doubt, is to say more than is true — more than can be reasonably demanded of faith.

Now this shadow, sometimes passing over the mind — why should it chill, or darken, or distress any one, as if it were something portentous, or, in fact, anything extraordinary? Certainty, it is true, would be grateful. Uncertainty is painful; though it is also, I think, and will yet attempt to show, useful. It is painful, however, I confess, in proportion as is great. But this is what I say — it is not at all surprising. It is a part of our dispensation. Some clouds are between us and those ever bright regions, in whose existence we fully believe. So God has willed it to be. We see through a glass darkly. We walk by faith and not by sight. We long for a sight of those regions of existence in which we are to live; but it has not pleased God to give us that vision.

And the point that I would urge is, that we should not give any undue importance to this lack of vision, or of certainty. We should do most unwisely and unnecessarily, to magnify the importance of this doubt, by considering it as anything peculiar, or awful, or criminal. It is painful, in-

deed, but not wonderful. It is painful; but the pain, like all the pains of our moral imperfection, is an element of improvement, and it is to be removed by reflection, by prayer, by self-purification. To the mind rightly thinking and feeling, the evidence of immortality is growing continually stronger and stronger. Already with some it touches upon the borders of certainty. So may it do with every one who hears me. And the direction to be given for every one's guidance is, not to stumble at doubt, but to press on to certainty. And I hold and firmly believe, that an assurance, all but vision, is just as certainly at the end of the process, with every right mind, as complete demonstration is at the end of every true theorem in science.

This undue importance attached to 'doubts becomes a still more serious matter, when it effects not only a man's opinions, but his practice. Do not many neglect to lead a strictly virtuous and religious life, on this plea of uncertainty about the result? Is it not, at least, the plea which the heart secretly offers, to justify its indolence or indifference? A man says with himself, "I do not know what *is* the right way, there are so many disputes about it;" and he thinks that an apology for his neglect of the whole subject. Or he says, perhaps, "I do not *know* that the Bible is true; I do not *know* that there is any future life, or that there is any retribution hereafter. If I *did know* it, I

should act upon my knowledge ; but the fact is, there is no certainty about these matters, and therefore I shall give myself no trouble about them." Now to justify this conclusion, he should be able to say, "I know that the Bible is *not* true, and that there *is* no future life, and no retribution hereafter." If he *could* say this, then his premises would be as broad as his conclusion. But to say, "I do not know," and therefore to do nothing, is as if a man should say, "I do not know that I shall have a crop, and therefore I will sow no seed ;" or, "I do not know that I shall gain property, and therefore I will do no business ;" or, "I do not know that I shall obtain happiness, and therefore I will not seek it." The truth is, that, in the affairs of this life, men act upon the strongest evidence, upon the strongest probability ; it is a part of the very wisdom of their condition, that they should so act ; and so they ought to act, so it is wise that they should be left to act in the affairs of religion. If any one refuses to act upon such a ground, he refuses the discipline of his own nature, and of God's providence ; and neither his own nature nor the providence of heaven, will hold him guiltless.

II. Nay more, as a religious being, he must act upon some ground, and he ought to choose the most reasonable ground ; and this is the substance of the second remark I have to offer on the nature of religious belief.

It is not often enough considered, perhaps, that every man, every thinking man, at least, must have some theory, must choose between opposing arguments; must come to some conclusion, which he is to take and defend, with all its difficulties. He, who doubts, is apt to regard himself as occupying vantage ground in religious discussion; as occupying a position above the believer, and entitled to look down upon him without sympathy, and even with scorn; as if he, the infidel, stood aloof from the difficulties that press upon questions of this nature. But this is an entire mistake. He, too, the infidel, is in the battle, and there is no discharge in that war. I have said that believing is doubting to a certain extent. I now say that doubting is believing to a certain extent. The doubter holds a theory. That extreme of doubt, denominated Pyrrhonism, is still a theory. It is believing something; and something very prodigious, too—even that *nothing* is to be believed! Doubting, I say, is believing to a certain extent. A man may say he is certain of nothing. But he is certain, I suppose, of his uncertainty; certain that he is a doubter; certain then that he is a thinker—certain that he is a conscious being. But still he may say—willing to doubt all he can—that with regard to the *objects* of his consciousness, he can have no certainty. He is conscious of the difference between truth and error, right and wrong, but he is not certain, he says, that these perceptions of his

agree with the absolute and eternal truth of things. The amount of it is this ; he knows some things, and he does not know others ; he knows the finite but not the infinite — knows the relative, but not the absolute ; and he is not certain that what he knows, agrees with what he does not know. I answer, neither is it his business to know this. He does not know that his *existence* is compatible with God's *existence* ; compatibility or incompatibility in the case he knows nothing about ; but he knows that *he exists* ; this he admits. And I say, just as surely does he know the difference between right and wrong. He cannot go behind this consciousness, into a region of doubt, any more than he can go behind the consciousness of his existence. Like a flash of lightning — like the voice of thunder, is this revelation of conscience from the thickest cloud of his doubts ; it is as clear and strong and irresistible.

But suppose that we have brought the doubter thus far to the recognition of the great primitive facts of philosophy and religion ; yet when we come to the deductions from these facts — to a system of faith — we have admitted that there is some uncertainty. How shall our reasoner proceed here ? Shall he say that because there is uncertainty, he will believe nothing ? That would be refusing to do the only thing and the very thing, which the circumstances require of him — even to choose between opposing arguments. It

would be as if the mariner should say, "the waters are unstable beneath me ; they sway me this way and that way ; and I will lay no course across the deep." No, the only question is — what is it best to *do* ? What is the wisest course to take ? What is it most reasonable to believe in ? The moral inquirer is on the ocean ; and to give himself up to doubt, indifference, and inaction, is to perish there. And the question is between remaining in this state, and adopting some religious faith for guidance and support.

Now it appears to me, that the coldest and feeblest statement of the argument for religious faith gathers strength and warmth, from being placed in this point of light. For thus would a man reason on this ground. "To doubt every thing—to doubt all the primitive facts of my moral consciousness, I have admitted, is self-contradicting absurdity. But to reject all religious systems flowing from them, because they are not equally certain, is as false in philosophy as to reject the original facts. Something, I *must believe* — something better or something worse. Some conclusions flow out of the principles, and I cannot help it. To reject all conclusion is irrational and impossible folly. Nay, more, I am bound to accept those conclusions that favor the improvement of my nature. That I am made to improve is as certain as that I am made to be. Now to reject *all religious faith*, is ruin to my

*the making such he ought to choose a religion
all religion is equally uncertain and equally true.*

spiritual nature. To deny, for instance, the doctrine of immortality, comes to the same thing; my soul dies now, if it is not to live for ever. To reject Christianity is to reject what is obviously the most powerful means of improvement in the world. At any rate, if there be no truth at all in religion, if its grandest principles are falsehoods, and its grandest revelations are dreams, then the very spring of improvement in me is broken, and my situation involves this astounding absurdity — that I am made to improve, to be happy in nothing else, and yet that this is the very thing for which no provision is made; that an appetite is given me, which craves divine and immortal good; that on its being supplied depends the essential life of my mind and heart; and yet, that beneath the heavens there is no food for it; no, nor above the heavens — that the only provision made for it is poison and death!"

Can this be? — as it must be if the skeptic's theory be true. Can it be that a light is on my path, which leads me to the loftiest and most blessed virtue and happiness — such is the light of Religion — and yet that it sprung from the dark suggestions of fraud and imposture? Can it be that God has formed our minds to feel the most inexpressible longings after a life, beyond the barriers of time; and yet, that he has left our hearts to break with the dreadful conviction that the blessed land is not for us? Is this the obvious

*I doubt if a skeptic could ever
 have all so much trouble as I have
 if happy here*

reasonableness of the skeptic's choice? Is this the charm of doubt, that is to outweigh the whole mass of evidence? Why such useless and cruel contradictions and incongruities, as enter into the unbeliever's plan? Why are we sent to wander through this world, in sorrow and despair, as we must do, if there is no guiding light and no inviting prospect?

It would be easy, if there were space in this discussion, to present in many lights, the glaring contradictions to which skepticism must lead, and which surely are harder to receive than any tolerably rational system of faith. Suppose that such system were not free from serious difficulties. I think it is; but suppose that it were not. Yet if the weight of evidence be in its favor—and if we must embrace some system; and that of faith clears up more difficulties than the opposite system; is it not most reasonable that our minds should settle down into a calm and confiding belief? Let every man, with these views, make his election. Let him choose, for these are the questions, whether he will take, for his portion, light or darkness, cheerfulness or sadness, hope or despair, the warmth of confiding piety or the cold and cheerless atmosphere of distrust, the spirit of sacred improvement or the spirit of worldly negligence and apathy. I do not wish, in making this contrast, to speak with any harshness of skepticism. I state it as it appears to myself, and as it

would appear, let me embrace whichever theory I might. Faith is light, and cheerfulness, and hope, and devotion, and improvement. And doubt, on essential points, is in its very nature darkness, and sadness, and despondency, and distrust, and spiritual death.

For which, think you — for I cannot help pressing the alternative a moment longer — for which was our nature made? To be lifted up and strengthened, to be bright and happy, or to be cast down and crushed—to be the victim of doubt—to be plunged into the dungeon of despair? Suppose a man should literally shut himself up in a dungeon; should sit down in darkness, and surround himself with none but dismal objects, should resign his powers to inaction, and give up all the glorious prospects and enjoyments of the wide and boundless universe; and then should say, that this was the portion designed for him by the Author of nature. What should we say to him? We should say, and surely we should take strong ground, “your Maker has given you limbs, and senses; he has given you active powers, and capacities for improvement, and he designed that you should use them; he made you not to dwell in a prison, not to dwell in dungeon glooms, but he made you for light, and action, and freedom, and improvement, and happiness. Your senses, your very faculties, both of body and mind, will perish and die, in this situation; go

forth, then, into the open and fair domain of nature and life." And this we may say, with equal force, to him who is pausing in the threshold of the dreary prison-house of skepticism. God made us not to know — not to know everything, for then must he have made us equal to himself — but to believe, to confide, to trust. And he who refuses to receive what is reasonable, because it is not certain, refuses obedience to that very law, under which he is created and must live.

I. COR. XIII. 12. — NOW I KNOW IN PART.

From these words, I resume the subject of my morning discourse. The subject was the nature of religious belief, though it was my leading object to present some *inferences* from the admitted principles of this kind of belief. With regard to the nature of faith, however, I stated what is admitted on all hands, that it is not certainty; that believing is not knowing; that this kind of conviction is entirely to be distinguished from intuition and from the results of scientific demonstration. But in this account of faith, I said that its original principles are not to be confounded. They are certain. They are not matters of faith, but of knowledge. I do not believe that I exist; I

know it. I do not *believe* in the difference between right and wrong; I *know* it. I do not *believe* that benevolence or the promotion of others' happiness is right; I *know* it. In all these cases, I assert a self-evident proposition; a truism, in fact. I am but saying in effect, that right is right, and wrong is wrong. But the moment I depart from these primary moral distinctions and first truths of religion, and take one step of deduction, that is a step of faith. Absolute certainty then forsakes me, and I stand upon the ground of faith. My deductions then are not mathematical, but moral; they are not certain, but they take their place on the scale of logical probability. That is to say, they are accompanied with something more or less of doubt; and religious doubting therefore, ought not to be made the monster that it has been, in the Christian world. It is giving an unwarrantable importance to doubt, thus to treat it. And this was the matter of my first inference. My next observation was, that every thinking man must have a system, and is bound to adopt that which is most reasonable; that the skeptic has a system as truly as the believer; and that in the balance of probabilities, the skeptic has adopted a system, which not only has its difficulties, like every other, but which has this special and insuperable difficulty — that it is fatal to the clearest principles and dearest hopes of human improvement.

III. In connection with what I have said about the nature of faith, let me now observe, in the third place, that those who profess to *know that they are right*, who profess this not only in regard to the great points of conscience and of consciousness, but also in regard to the peculiarities of their creed, have as little to support them, in a just view of the subject, as those who give an undue importance to their doubts; or as those who choose a system of doubt, (by definition, the weaker system,) in preference to a system of faith.

I have heard men say, when comparing themselves with their religious opponents, and I have remarked that it was said with great self-complacency, "The difference between us and others is, that they think indeed, that they are right, but we know that we are right. *They* are confident that they hold the truth, but *we* are certain" — not confident, oh! by no means, confident! "we are certain that we hold the truth." Now for any men to say this, is so very little to the credit of their discrimination, that it cannot be *much* to the credit of their correctness. It shows that so far from being entitled to presume that they have the right faith, that they do not know what any faith is — that they do not know what faith is in the most generic sense — that they do not understand the definition of the term. Faith is not knowledge. Believing that we are right is not, in any tolerable use of the English language, knowing

that we are right. For what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? What he knoweth, why doth he speak of as a matter of faith? Demonstration is one thing; a creed is another, and an entirely different thing. It is so, by definition.

I do not object to a firm persuasion in any mind, that it is right, provided the point be one on which it is competent to decide. I do not object, *now*, to the use of the phrase, (as a phrase of great emphasis and energy,) "I know, or I feel, or I am sure," that a certain doctrine is true. But when any persons profess to use this expression of confidence literally and accurately, when they hold this their assurance, as a specific and triumphant distinction; when they claim to be superior to others on such ground, and would attempt to overawe and abash modest and thoughtful men, by such arrogant and irrational pretensions to infallibility, I think it a proper occasion for applying the language of the apostolic rebuke, and telling them that they "know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm." They quite mistake the subject and subject-matter of which they are speaking; and I have only to remind them that it is *believing* that they were talking about, not *knowing*.

The principle must be a very poor one too, that works so poorly in practice; that destroys itself, indeed, the moment it is brought to its application. If different classes of Christians will say,

modestly, and no matter how solemnly, that they believe that they are right ; and yet will concede so much to human frailty as to admit, that they may be wrong in some measure ; then, their respective claims do not destroy each other entirely, nor destroy the common faith. But if every class will have it that it *knows* itself to be right, and knows everything differing from it to be wrong ; what a picture of presumptuous, distracted, and self-destroying churches is presented to us ? Here is the Calvinist, that knows *he* is right ; and the Arminian knows *he* is right ; and the Universalist knows *he* is right ; and the Swedenborgian has *his* full measure of the same comfortable knowledge ; and the Presbyterian and Episcopalian, and the Methodist and Baptist, are each and all, possessed of the same undoubting assurance. Are all right, then, in the points on which they differ ? No ; that is impossible. To what, then, does this vaunted distinction of *knowing*, amount ? To nothing at all. That cannot be a distinction which appertains to all classes—to individuals, that is to say, of all classes. To what, then, does the knowing itself amount ? I answer once more, to nothing at all. For it is clear, that all this knowing cannot be knowledge. It may be confidence, and presumption, and positive assertion, but it is not knowledge.

But a man may say, “it is a matter of experience, and therefore I know it.” *What,*

let me ask, is a matter of experience? Not that any theological system is true, not that any doctrine is revealed, not that any one mode of church order is divinely ordained. These are matters of inference, not of experience. "Nay, but my meaning," says the confident votary, "is, that my faith or my mode of worship has had such an effect upon me; it has so delightfully wrought itself into my experience, that I am sure it must be the true doctrine, the true way. Heaven has thus sealed it to me in absolute certainty." If only one class could say this, it might amount to something like presumptive proof. But the truth is, that every form of faith and discipline can present just such instances. It is particularly true, that recent conversion to a religious system is apt to produce this kind of vivid experience. There is not a faith in Christendom, Catholic or Protestant, strict or liberal, but has converts ready to proclaim its efficiency. The argument proves too much legitimately to prove anything.

This arrogance, too, is as unseemly as it is baseless. If the subject did not forbid it, yet the sense of imperfection ought to restrain a frail, fallible, erring human being from such presumption — presumption too, which is commonly strong, in proportion as the doctrine is dark and doubtful, and the mind is readier to decide than to examine. Such, indeed, was not the spirit of Newton, "child like sage." Such, was not the spirit

of Socrates, who, against the all-knowing sophists of his day, was accustomed to say that he professed to know nothing — that he was only a seeker after knowledge. Such, in fine, has never been the spirit of deep study and patient thought. But assurance rises up to speak, where modesty is silent; and a rash judgment, to pronounce, where patient inquiry hesitates; and ignorance to say, “I know,” where real knowledge can only say, “I believe.”

Such was not the spirit of the author of the “Saints’ Rest,” nor of the good old English time. “I am not so foolish,” says Baxter, “as to pretend my certainty to be greater than it is, merely because it is a dishonor to be less certain. My certainty, that I am a man, is before my certainty, that there is a God. My certainty, that there is a God, is before my certainty, that he requireth love and holiness of his creatures. My certainty of this is greater than my certainty of the life of rewards and punishments hereafter. My certainty of that is greater than my certainty of the endless duration of it, and the immortality of individual souls. My certainty of the Deity is greater than my certainty of the Christian faith. My certainty of the Christian faith, in its essentials, is greater than my certainty of the perfection and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures. And my certainty of that is greater than my certainty of many particular texts, and so of the truth of many

particular doctrines, and of the canonicalness of some certain books."

Let me add a word of caution, however, if it can be necessary, in closing this part of my discourse. Because I maintain that absolute certainty does not properly attach to matters of faith, let it not by any means be regarded as a fair inference, that the great points of our Christian faith are to be held as if they were doubtful matters. A believer is, by definition, one whom belief, and not doubt, characterizes. And the Christian belief, I hold to be founded on such evidence, as to be put "beyond all reasonable doubt." This phrase — "beyond reasonable doubt" — is held in the law, to describe the nearest approach to certainty, that is compatible with the nature of moral evidence — to describe such a degree of confidence as lays a just foundation for decision and action. Such I hold to be the nature and strength of the Christian faith.

I have thus attempted to show that uncertainty or doubt, greater or less in degree, is a part of our dispensation, implied in that declaration of the Apostle, that we know only in part; that it is implied in the very nature of moral evidence; implied in faith; and therefore that it is not to be regarded as monstrous, nor to be magnified into undue importance, nor to be made a reason for rejecting the system of faith; unless, in the second place, it can lay claim to a strength and con-

sistency, and an escape from difficulties, which will give it manifest superiority over the system of faith—a superiority which, on great points, is denied to it by its utter insufficiency to improve, exalt, strengthen, and bless human nature; and, finally, I have insisted, that, on the other hand, no rational system of faith, when it goes beyond the principles of absolute conscience and consciousness, can pretend to be freed from doubt—can pretend to absolute certainty; and hence, that the confident assurance of the fanatic is, in this matter, as much out of place, as the overweening self-complacency of the skeptic.

IV. But after all, this, to some, may be a very unsatisfactory view of the subject. They may even think it injurious and unsafe. I must not leave the subject, therefore, without attempting, in the last place, to show the *utility* of that moral system and mental discipline, under which, as I contend, we are placed. That we are placed under it, is, indeed, in my view, a sufficient answer to all objections. But it may still be asked, why is it so? Why is there one shadow or shade left on our path? Why, instead of showing brighter and brighter, can it not be, from the beginning, one track of brightness? Why are we not made just as sure of every moral truth, that is interesting and important to us, as we are that we behold the light of the Sun? Why, in fine, is not moral evidence, like mathematical demonstration, put beyond every possibility of doubt?

It might, indeed, be answered that the very nature of the subjects, and of the mind, makes the difference. And I believe that this is true. At any rate, it is inconceivable to us that moral deductions should, by any possibility, have been made as definite and certain as those of the most exact science. But I am not obliged to rest the answer on this apparent necessity of the case alone; and I proceed to offer, in further defence of that moral constitution of things under which our minds are trained up, the consideration of utility.

I say, then, that it is a useful system — a good system — the best system by us conceivable. If I am asked why we have not vision, instead of promise, to guide us; why we have not assurance, instead of trust; why not knowledge, instead of faith; I answer, because it is not expedient for us. Probably we could not bear vision, or it would be too much for our contentment or our attention to the objects around us; — but I do not rest on a probability. I appeal to what is certain also; and that is, that assurance and knowledge would lessen the trial of virtue and of the intellect; and therefore would hinder their improvement.

To give an illustration of my meaning, and especially to show why it may not be expedient that we should have an actual vision of a future life, — it is not best that children, for instance, should be introduced to an actual knowledge or experience of the circumstances, allurements, or interests of

matürer life. That view of the future might too much dazzle or engross them, might distract them from the proper business of their education, and might, in many ways, bring a trial upon their young spirits, beyond their power to bear. Therefore, they look through a veil upon the full strength of human passions and interests. Human love and hate, and hope and fear, human ambition and covetousness, and splendor and beauty, they see through a glass darkly. Just as little might we be able in this childhood of our being, to have the realities of a future scene laid open to us.

Again, for an illustration of the general advantages of inquiry instead of certainty ; — if a man were to travel around the globe, it might be far more agreeable and easy to him, to have a broad and beaten pathway, to have marked and regular stages, to be borne onward in a chariot under an experienced and safe conduct, and to have deputations from the nations he passed through, to wait upon him, and to inform him exactly of every thing he wished to know. But would such a grand progress be as favorable to his character, to his mental cultivation or moral discipline, to his enterprise and good sense and hardihood and energy, as it would be to thread out his way for himself ; to overcome obstacles and extricate himself from difficulties ; to take, in other words, the general chart of his travels, and to gain

an acquaintance with men and things, by inquiry and observation, and reasoning and experience? Such is the course ordained for the moral traveler in passing through this world. And certainly it is better for him; better that he should draw conclusions, though he make mistakes; better that he should reason upon probabilities, though he sometimes err; better that he should gain wisdom from experience, though the way be rough and sometimes overshadowed with uncertainty, than that he should always move on, upon the level, and easy, and sure path of knowledge.

Apply the same question to the ordinary course of life. A youth might always have a tutor, or a mentor to direct him. And then he would always be in the condition of one who knew what to do, of one who had no doubt. Yes, and *he would always be a child*. Can any one doubt that it would be more conducive to his improvement, to his courage and resolution, to his wisdom and worth, that he should be obliged to reason, to employ his powers, to be tried with conflicting views of subjects, to find out his own way, to grow wise by his own experience, and to have light break in upon his path as he needs it, or as he seeks it? But such is the actual course of life; and similar to this, is the course which the mind must take in the religious life.

Nor is this all. It appears to me that there is one further, more specific, and more important

use of the trials of faith ; and that is, that they urge us to the most strenuous self-purification, and fervent piety. I believe that it is an express law of the religious progress, that the advancement and strength of our faith, other things being equal, are always in proportion to the fervor and purity of our religious affections. This law results from the very nature of the subjects to which it relates. Our faith in Christianity, for instance, and in a future life, is not a deduction of abstract reasoning, irrespective of ourselves, and of the character of God, or of the nature of the communication as compared with them. Belief is *grounded*, in part, on certain views of our nature and wants, and on certain views of the character of God. Now, none but a pure and spiritual mind can estimate the transcendent worth of its own nature, or can so love God, as to entertain a just view of his love to us, and to hope all, that the filial mind *will* hope from him. Self-purification, therefore, is an essential part of the progress to light and certainty.

In this progress, not a few have arrived to the very confines of the land of vision. Their faith has become scarcely less than assurance. Invisible things have not only become the great realities, as they are to all men of true faith ; but they have become, as it were, almost visible ; there is a presence of God, felt and almost seen, in all nature and life ; there is, in the heart, an assurance, a

feeling of heaven and immortality. So it is oftentimes with the good man in the approach to death ; the veil of flesh is almost rent from him ; the shadows of mortal imperfection are disappearing ; the threshold of heaven is gained ; and beamings from the ever-bright regions, fill his soul with their blessed light. Then it is, that it is hard to return to life ; to pass again beneath the shadow ; to feel the cold, dull realities of life effacing the impressions of heavenly beauty and glory. This is sometimes looked upon, I know, as a kind of hallucination, a visionary rapture ; and so it sometimes may be ; but the truth is, that in the purified mind, it is the result of principles in accordance with the strictest reason. The explanation is, that such a mind is prepared to receive the full and entire impression of the objects of faith ; the light of heaven is indeed around that mind, because it is as an image pure and polished and bright to *reflect* the light of heaven.

True faith is, *indeed*, a great and sublime quality. It is greater, I am persuaded, than it is commonly accounted to be, much as it is exalted, and lauded in religious discourses. It is sometimes lauded, indeed, at the expense of reason. It is often so represented as if its sublimity consisted in its being a mystical quality, in its superiority to works, to the labors of duty, to the exercise of the quiet and patient virtues. To the hearer of such representations, it often seems as if this glory

and charm of faith lay in a sort of visionary peace of mind, obtained without any reference to the culture of the mind or of the heart. But, no; the very reverse of this is the truth. Faith is a great and sublime quality, because it is founded in eternal reason; because it is a patient and faithful inquirer, and not a hasty and self-confident rejector, not an idolizer of its own fanciful and visionary suggestions of doubt. It is great too, because it is moral; because, as an Apostle declares, it works by love, and purifies the heart; because it is an elevation of the soul towards the purity and glory of the only and independently great and glorious Being. It is great, moreover, and in fine, because it is a principle of perpetual advancement. It does not write down its creed, as if it could never go beyond that; as if that were its standard and its limit; as if that were the sum and the perfection of all that it could ever receive. No; it is a sublime principle, because it takes hold of the sublimity of everlasting progress. When it reaches a brighter sphere; when it no longer knows in part, but knows as it is known; when its contemplation has become actual vision, and its deductions have risen to assume the certainty and take the place of first principles; then will it, on the basis of these first principles, proceed to still farther deductions. Still and ever will the fields of inquiry lie before it—far and for ever before it. Onward and onward

will they spread, beneath other heavens, to other horizons, — bright regions, leading to yet brighter regions, — boundless worlds for thought to traverse, beyond the track of solar day, — where — where shall its limit be? — what eye can pursue its flight through the infinitude of ages!

Christian! wouldst thou make that boundless, that glorious career thine own? Then be faithful to the light that now shines around thee. Sink not to rest or slumber, beneath the passing shadows of doubt. To sink, — to sleep, is not thy destination, but to wake, — to rise. Rise then to the glorious pursuit of truth; connect with it the work of self-purification; open thy mind to heavenly hope; aspire to the life everlasting! Count it not a strange thing that thou hast difficulties and doubts. Well has it been said, that he who never doubted, never believed. Shrink not and be not afraid, when that cloud passeth over thee. *Through* the cloud, still press onward. Only be assured of this, and with this assurance be of good courage — God made thee to believe. Without faith, the ends of thy being cannot be accomplished, and therefore, it is certain that he made thee to believe. In perfect confidence, then, say this with thyself — “I am *sure* that I shall *believe*; all that is necessary for me, I *shall* believe; in the faithful and humble use of my faculties, I am assured that I shall come to this result. I fear not doubt; I fear not darkness; doubt is the

way to faith, and darkness is the way to light." Come, holy light ! come, blessed faith ! and cheer every humble seeker with joy unspeakable and full of glory !

And it *will* come to every true and trusting heart. Why do I say this ? Because, I still repeat, I know that God made our nature for faith, and virtue, and improvement. Why should it be difficult to see this ? And are not skepticism and sin and the process of moral deterioration, — are they not misery and darkness and destruction to our nature ? Look at the young tree of the forest. Are you not sure that God made it to grow ? And can you doubt that he made your moral nature, to grow and flourish ? But how does he make *that tree* to grow ? By pouring perpetual sunshine upon it ? No ; he sends the storm and the tempest upon it ; the overshadowing cloud lowers upon its waving top, — and its branches wrestle with the rude elements. So is it with human faith. Amidst storm and calm, amidst cloud and sunshine alike, it rises and rises, stronger and stronger — till it is transplanted at length, to the fair clime of heaven ; there to grow and blossom, amidst everlasting light, in everlasting beauty.

CURSORY OBSERVATIONS
ON THE QUESTIONS AT ISSUE BETWEEN ORTHODOX
AND LIBERAL CHRISTIANS.*

NO. I. INTRODUCTORY.

IN offering to the Public, a series of cursory and miscellaneous remarks on the questions between the Orthodox and Liberal parties, I am disposed, at the outset, to say something by way of apology. My defence might perhaps justly relate to other and more important particulars, but I confess that the feeling I have most to contend with, in myself, and I suppose it exists in others, is a strong reluctance to come into that collision with others, with opponents, I mean, to which controversy leads. The case, I must think, is a pecul-

* I mean no offence by this designation of the parties. If the words, Orthodox and Liberal, be taken in a literal sense, then, of course, I claim to be orthodox, and I do not deny that others are liberal. But I take the terms as they are used in common parlance; and I prefix them to this series of articles, because no other cover the whole ground of the discussion. In any view, if others assume the title of Orthodox, I think they cannot charge us with presumption, if we adopt the title of Liberal.

ially hard one on our side of the question. I know, at least, that it involves many painful feelings.

Men do not often nor easily place themselves in the situation of others; least of all, of their opponents. The dominant sect of a country little know to what they subject an individual, when they cut him off from so many of the sympathies of the social world around him. To a man, who has spent his youth in severe and wasting studies, with the honorable and ardent hope of being useful and acceptable to his fellow men, who, with patient inquiries and earnest prayers, has sought for truth; who, in deep and solitary meditations, has sought for the pure fountains of all generous and holy influences, wherewith he might nourish and quicken the piety of others — to such an one it is hard to meet with no welcome in the countenance and manners of society; nay, to meet with suspicion and hostility, where he looked for welcome, to be summoned to strife, where he desired peace and amity, to be brought to the bar as an accused person, when he hoped to be hailed as the messenger of glad tidings. And he feels — the honest and affectionate advocate of religion feels, that he has glad tidings to communicate. His heart is ready to kindle with his theme, he would spread before mankind the venerable and lovely perfections of God, he would call and win them to piety, and virtue, and glory, he would

gladly cherish the tenderness, and love, and charity, that belong to a mission so sacred and merciful ; and how is his heart smitten within him, to reflect that all these sentiments and affections are denied to him, that he is looked upon as engaged in a bad work, that multitudes regard his doctrine and preaching and person with aversion or horror ! Besides, that must be a bad mind, indeed, to which contention is not in itself painful. Who does not feel sometimes tempted to leave the world to its controversies, to leave the opposing sects to fight it out among themselves, if they will,—to withdraw from the visible ranks of all religious denominations, and to take his way, alone and peacefully, to the grave, where all these strifes are so soon to be composed ? Who that feels how many are the *necessary* trials of life, how becoming are sympathy, and pity, and forbearance, in such a world as this, how great is the moral work which he and every man has to do, and how solemn is the destiny of eternity,—who, I say, feeling all this, does not grow sick, at the thoughts of contending with his brethren in ignorance, and frailty, and affliction, his brethren in the great errand and end of life, his brethren in the solemn account of an hereafter ?

I confess, that under the influence of these considerations, I am sometimes ready to shrink from what I do nevertheless conceive to be the duty of contending earnestly for those principles, which I

hold to be the faith once delivered to the saints. So far as I might consult the first feelings and impulses natural to me as a citizen, a friend, a social man, I should sedulously avoid it. I should choose to pass in society, without attracting any attention to my religious belief. I should reserve the comfort and joy of religious fellowship for my intercourse with those, who would meet me in the affection and confidence of that fellowship. I would endeavor so to enjoy that privilege as not to have the reflection forced upon me, that I am surrounded by suspicions and strifes, or by benevolent, though as I think mistaken, anxieties and regrets.

If then I address any who have a strong aversion to controversial discussions, I may safely affirm that I feel it not less than they. I have a good mind, at times, to sweep from my table, every controversial book, tract, publication, Review and Newspaper, and henceforth to know nothing and to care nothing about them — to know nothing and to care for nothing but religion as a general subject of contemplation, and a guide and comfort of life. There is no honor nor comfort to be reaped from these contests ; and to the honorable, the liberal, the better and more sacred feelings of the mind they are attended with no little danger. I said, no comfort. There is the satisfaction, indeed, arising from the discharge of what is believed to be a duty ; and that, I trust, is the consideration that, with me, settles the question.

This *must* be the repose of faithful and honest minds, engaged in controversy with those whom they would fain regard as brethren and friends.

And it is my purpose, (as I have partly intimated,) in these introductory remarks, to meet the natural reluctance, which many feel to read anything of a controversial nature.

I say, then, that *the state of the public mind demands investigations of this kind*. The age is thoroughly agitated with questions of all sorts, political, moral, and religious — with all those questions, especially, which bear upon human happiness. On all these questions, and in foreign countries, even, on that of the diffusion of knowledge, there is a liberal party, and an orthodox party — or, in other words, there are advocates of new opinions, and adherents of old opinions. But of all the questions that thus agitate the general mind, none bear more directly upon the general welfare than those which are religious. None, indeed, do more palpably affect the *rights* of men. None do *so* vitally affect their happiness. For it is when my soul is defended, and my political freedom secured, and I go and sit down under the shadow of my own dwelling with none to disturb or make me afraid ; it is then, and after all that, that the great question is to be settled in the feelings and habits of my own mind, *whether or not I shall be happy*. And it is here in this interior, this secret and silent world of thoughts and pur-

poses, of moral ideas and contemplations and affections, that religion has the amplest scope and the widest dominion.

Something of this is beginning to be felt ; and men, at least, men generally, are inquiring, as they never before inquired, for the difference between truth and error, right and wrong, pure religion and needless superstition. And he who can be insensible to the importance of these inquiries, or can turn indifferently away from them as not worth his regard, understands neither the discussion, nor the duty it devolves upon him.

It is, by no means, a light discussion ; and this is the second consideration which bears upon the question of duty in the controversy of the age. It is a great controversy. It is not about the minor forms and features of religion. It is not about a church government or ritual. It is, in part, about the very nature of morality and piety. It is mainly a practical question. It is not even concerning the Trinity that we are most deeply interested, as a matter of controversy. That seems to me a scholastic question ; and more properly to belong to a scholastic age. And, in fact, it is only from the strongly practical cast, which the spirit of the present age gives to every discussion, that this question of the Trinity is brought into such earnest debate. That is to say, it is not because the question, as I apprehend it, has any important and immediate bearing upon the nature of relig-

ion or the character of God, but because it is *artificially* mingled with the practical popular system of the age, that it has any considerable interest. The *great* questions, at issue, are these. What is the true character, the real, moral perfection of God, and what is the system of religious sentiments that truly illustrates his character and perfection? What is it to be a good man and a Christian? What constitutes the true preparation of a moral being for happiness, and God's favor, here and hereafter, and what is the true, right, and best method of making that preparation? What are the just principles of Christian Catholicism and candor, and in what consists the violation of these principles? Or, to bring the same question into a briefer statement, the great inquiry of the age is, how shall a man regard his Maker—the character, providence, and revelations of his Maker; himself—his nature, his welfare, and duty; and his fellow beings—their feelings, interests, and inquiries, on the subject of religion? These, I say, are the great questions; and no man, who reflects deeply, can help feeling that they are questions of momentous concern. They come home to our bosoms. They enter deeply into the essential welfare of our minds. And no weak, or morbid sensibility to the trials of controversy should withhold us from discussions that thus touch the vital interests of our being. I do not say, indeed, that such discussions *altogether* in-

volve those interests. There are good men on both sides, in this controversy. But it does nevertheless *affect* their most precious interests ; and that is enough to give it a claim upon our attention.

On the great questions at issue, both parties, of course, believe their adversaries to be in error. And I shall now undertake to state, in the third place, what are the errors, as we conceive them, in the popular system of religion, which we are bound, believing them such, not only to reject, but to oppose.

After all that is said and written on this subject, I do not think that the practical features and bearings of this system are made sufficiently conspicuous, and, therefore, I shall endeavor to unfold them in their true *moral* character, and with a careful regard, at the same time, to the most recent explanations.

The popular, or Calvinistic system, then, teaches that all men by nature are totally depraved. That is to say, the moral constitution of men as certainly develops sin and sin only, as their intellectual constitution develops memory or reason. There is amiableness, indeed, and a seeming goodness ; but it is only seeming. According to the only true and righteous judgment of God and good men, everything in the human heart, and everything actually proceeding from it, is utterly wicked and abominable ; and all the current

language of discrimination, between the good and bad qualities of the mass of society around us, is the fruit of entire mistake and delusion, — for the simple reason, that there is *really* nothing *good* among them ; that men, in general, are in every thought, word, and deed, only, and altogether, and always, *bad* ! This entire wickedness, thus inevitably flowing from the very constitution which God has given to men, or from the circumstances in which he has placed them, is charged upon them as the most unspeakable guilt ; such a guilt as to render an infinite atonement necessary. And here, in the popular system, is introduced the practical use of the doctrine of the Trinity. For it is contended that, in order to expiate this guilt, and to render it proper that God should pardon it, it was necessary that the Almighty himself, in the second person of the Trinity, should take to himself human nature ; and, that this complex being, one part of whom was the immaculate and omnipresent God, should hang upon the cross, and there die, as truly as ever any human culprit did. But this is only one of the doctrines, that have sprung from the original stock — viz. the native and total depravity of men. This depravity of course implies an absolute and supreme unwillingness to be good and holy ; so that it is rendered just as certain, that man, without the special interposition of God, will never fail or cease to sin, when the object of sinful affection is presented,

as that he will never fail to think, when the object of thought is presented. This is the much explained doctrine of *moral inability*. It is not that a man is unable to be holy, in the same sense in which he is unable to lift a tree of the forest from its roots. It is a *moral* inability, say its advocates: but still it *is* an inability, as invincible, as immovable, by human power, though not in the same sense immovable, as the oak of the forest. In other words, it is an unwillingness, originated in the soul by the will or by the providence of Him who made it, springing up with the first exertion of its moral faculties, occupying and possessing the *whole moral being* of a man, and leaving in it, therefore, no prop, no power whereby a holy disposition may be raised up. That disposition, whenever formed, arises, it is said, from no antecedent willingness in the sinful creature, but from the interposing and special grace of God. And this leads us to notice the most distressing and tremendous feature of the whole system. The needful grace is withholden from multitudes; or to use the most mild and cautious language, this special grace does not act, does not take effect upon multitudes. And, therefore, as an inevitable consequence, these multitudes, only for conforming to a law of their *being* or *condition*, no matter which — only for acting as they are certain to do, are doomed to remediless, endless, infinite woes! The being, born with the seeds of this aw-

ful malady within him, lives till they develop in his constitution the fatal disease, and then, after, it may be, one day or one month of suffering under this sickness, which he could not originally prevent, he is, *for* this sickness, a cherished, if you choose to say so, but still a natural sickness—he is sent down to those fires of hell, which, though they will burn for ever, will never purge away one plague-spot of the foul and loathsome distemper !

This is no fiction, no awful dream, no vision of horror, visiting the distempered imagination through the curtain of darkness and night ; but it is an open and daylight reality, declared in the high places of the pulpit, preached to congregations of men, with all their waking senses and faculties about them. Awful as the statement is, I have weighed every word of it with extreme caution, and delivered it, on mature deliberation ; and I ask any intelligent Calvinist to deny it in any part or particular. It would give me the sincerest pleasure, if one step in this terrific procession of doctrines were denied to belong to it,—if one link, in that iron chain, which seems to me to bind justice and mercy equally, were fairly and for ever broken. Should any Calvinist revolt at the representation, then, I would ask him to specify the part he would give up. I would say to him,—“do you not believe that the nature of a man is what God gives him, and that this nature in every man is totally depraved ? Or do you

not believe that this nature is placed in such a condition, that total depravity is the certain result? Is not this total depravity an entire unwillingness to be holy? Is not this unwillingness, being total, so strong as to make it certain, in the eye of God, that, without his special interposition, it will continue till death? And continuing thus, is it not the very thing — though it sprang from nature, though it was just as certain to be developed in the constitution of man, as the appetite of hunger, or the faculty of reason — is it not the very thing, this native, total depravity, that will fix upon a man, according to your doctrine, the doom of endless suffering? ”

And if all this be true, what is its aspect, I solemnly ask, towards piety, towards all our reverent, grateful, and affectionate thoughts of God? Would *any* man, I seriously ask, be willing to take to himself the character, which he thus ascribes to his Maker? Would any parent be, for the world, thought capable of treating his children thus — or any king, his subjects — or any master, his servants? And is there no reason for pausing at a system, which thus shocks all the moral sentiments of mankind?

And yet, this is the system that professes itself to be the only, and exclusively, TRUE GOSPEL! And *it is this language of exclusion*, which I notice as a final reason for calling it into discussion.

A respectable body of men, against whom no prevailing corruption or viciousness is even alleged, who were once accounted as faithful and pious as any other men, have, after long, patient, and prayerful inquiry, arrived at the sincere and solemn conviction, that the doctrines of Calvinism are not the doctrines of Christ. We profess to revere and receive that Teacher and Saviour, but we see his instructions in a different light from our brethren. And, now, what is the treatment we meet with? and what, I add, is our duty in the circumstances?

The treatment is but too well known. The very name of Christians is denied us. In the current nomenclature of the day, we are denied a place among the denominations called Christians.

Our duty, I believe, is earnest remonstrance. We hold this name too dear, to be silently bereft of it. "Jesus Christ is precious to us, as he is to all them that believe." His character, his revelations, his doctrines, his promises, lay us under an obligation, and fill us, we trust, with a gratitude, which do not permit us calmly to bear the imputation of being his rejectors and enemies. Our accusers might well denominate us cold and indifferent to the Gospel, if we could sit down silently under this imputation.

I do hold, that this is a very serious matter, and one that ought to be brought into discussion. For the controversy has come to this. It is not so

much between Calvinists and Arminians, Trinitarians and Unitarians, as between the EXCLUSIVE SECT and the CATHOLIC SECT. These are the parties now arrayed against each other. It is on this ground, that a new division of the community is taking place. And for my own part, it is the only question that has ever touched me very nearly. That a man is a Calvinist or a Trinitarian, does not offend me. He differs with me, only in the matter of a metaphysical creed. I can still have the most agreeable conversation, and happy intercourse, and intimate friendship, with him. But if he says, "I cannot acknowledge you as a Christian; you hold a belief which undermines the very foundation of piety and of all religious virtue; I consider you, and all who believe with you, as preparing for the fellowship of accursed spirits;" if this is the language he holds, or if this is the meaning of his heart, the case is totally changed. All valuable ties between us are broken. I want no hollow courtesies from that man. I can understand no hair-breadth distinctions, between a good man, and a bad Christian. I know of but one kind of goodness, but one kind of worth, but one kind of piety; and if he denies me that, there is no foundation for respect and confidence, and without respect and confidence there can be no friendship nor society. I wish the man, who denies me these, no ill. I will feed him, if he is hungry; I will clothe him, if he is naked; and if

needy, I will accept the same offices from him. But for the intercourse of minds, for the best ties of society, no ground nor support is left.

And how unfortunate is it — for I am glad to forsake the criminary part of this discussion, which no man can have been more reluctant to read, than I have been to write — how unfortunate is it, I say, that these ties should be broken ! Here is a community of beings, frail, ignorant, erring, liable to prejudices, beset with difficulties in the way to truth ; and how much might they help each other by quitting the banded ranks of party, and mingling together in a respectful and confiding intercourse, by visiting at each other's houses, and sitting down in each other's churches, and listening to each other's arguments and explanations, and witnessing the spirit of prayer which, I doubt not, would be found in both. Can any reasonable man help feeling that this is the proper attitude for those to take, who differ in the solemn concerns of a salvation, alike precious, eternally precious to all ? Could any good man help delighting to see them meeting and mingling, on terms like these ? Behold, how good and pleasant a thing is it for brethren — and we are all brethren, in frailty, in affliction, in anxiety, and in the great hope of salvation — Behold, how good and pleasant a thing is it for brethren to agree ! Agreed we should be in spirit, in desire, in prayer, and we might soon agree in faith. Would we thus help

each other, " we might all soon come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, and unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

CURSORY OBSERVATIONS.

NO. II. ON THE TRINITY.

WHAT is the doctrine of the Trinity? It is, that the Almighty Father is God; that Jesus, whom he sent into the world, is God; and that the Holy Spirit — represented also as a separate agent — is God; and yet that these three, “equal in power and glory,” are but one God. This is what the advocate of the Trinity *says*. But now let me ask him to consider what it is, that he *thinks*: not what are the words he uses, but what are his actual conceptions. If he conceives of only one God — one Infinite Mind — and then if all that he means by the Trinity is, that the Saviour and the Holy Spirit partook, in some sense, of the nature of God; this is nothing materially different from what we all believe. If he means that the Father, Son, and Spirit, are only representations of the same God, acting in their characters, then he is not a Trinitarian, but a Sabellian. But if he goes farther, and attempts to grasp the real doctrine of the Trinity; if he attempts to conceive

of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, as possessing each a distinct existence, consciousness, and volition — as holding counsel and covenant with each other ; then, though he may call these Three one — though he may repeat it to himself all the day long, that they are but one ; yet does he actually conceive of them as three agents, three beings, three Gods ? The human mind, I aver, is so constituted, that it *cannot* conceive of three agents, sustaining to each other the relations asserted by the doctrine of the Trinity, without conceiving of them as three Gods.

Let the reader keep his mind free from all confusion on this point, arising from Christ's incarnation, or adoption of human nature. *Before* that event, the distinction is held by Trinitarians to be just as marked as it is now. Then it was that the Father covenanted with the Son. Then it was, that the Son offered to assume human nature, and not the Father. Then it was, that the Father promised to the Son that he should "see the travail of his soul and be satisfied." Then it was that the Father sent the Son into the world. Is it possible for any human mind to contemplate these relations, without conceiving of those between whom they existed, as two distinct, self-conscious Beings ? I aver that it is not. The Father, by supposition, must have known that he was not the Son. The Son must have known that he was not the Father. Two, who speak to

one another — who confer together — the one of whom commissions, the other is commissioned — the one of whom sends the other into the world — these two are, to every human mind so contemplating them, and are in spite of itself, two beings. If not, then there is nothing in the universe answering to the idea of two beings. We all partake of a common humanity ; and it might just as well be maintained that all *men* are one being, as that the three in the Trinity are one being.

In simple truth, I do not see why any reader on this subject need go farther than this. Till something credible is offered to be proved — till something better than absolute self-contradiction is proposed as a matter of belief, who is bound to attend to the argument ?

I mean no discourtesy nor injustice to the Unitarian, unless argument shall be thought such. I know that he supposes himself to hold a theory which escapes from the charge of self-contradiction. But so long as he says that the Father sent the Son, and that these two are one and the same being, I believe that he does not and cannot escape from it. I know that he professes to believe in one God ; and in truth — in all his practical and devotional thoughts — whenever he prays to the Father *through* the Son — he is, and his mind compels him to be, *virtually a Unitarian*. And this doubtless is, and always has been, the state of

the general mind. Practical Unitarianism has always been the general faith of Christendom. Even when, as in the Roman Church, and sometimes in the Protestant, men have prayed to Jesus Christ, it would be found, if their thoughts could be confessed, that they have forgotten the Father for the time, and their error has not consisted in Trithemism, but in clothing the being, called Jesus, with the attributes of sole Divinity. Still, though erring, they have been practical Unitarians. But scholastic men have always been weaving theories, at variance with the popular and effective belief. Half of the history of philosophy might be written in illustration of this single point. Such a theory, I conceive, is the Trinity. It has existed in studies, in creeds, in theses, in words; but not in the actual conceptions of men, not in their heartfelt belief. From the days when Tertullian complained in the second century, that the common people would not receive this doctrine, and down through all the ages of seeming assent, and to this very day, I believe that it has ever been the same dead letter. And when Christianity has fairly thrown off this incumbrance, as I believe it will, I have no doubt that many will say, what not a few are saying now, "we never did believe in the Trinity; we always felt that the Son was inferior to the Father who sent him."

But how then, I may be asked, does it come to pass, that this doctrine is honestly and earnestly

maintained by a great many able and learned men, to be accordant with the teachings of Scripture? Because, I answer, that, on a certain theory of interpretation, there is a great deal of proof for it from Scripture; while upon another and true principle, I firmly believe that there is none at all.

Let me invite the reader's attention, for a few moments, to the consideration of this point—the *true* principle of interpretation. My own conviction is, that it settles the whole question; but at any rate, I cannot, in this cursory view which I am taking, go over the ground of the whole argument; and therefore I shall confine myself to the most material point at issue.

We must all have seen by this time—indeed, I think the whole Christian world must have perceived, how impossible it is to settle any question from the Scriptures, by bare textual discussion. Texts may be arrayed against texts, and have been for ages, and might be, from *any* mass of writings like the Scriptures;—they might be, and have been, thus arrayed by the parties to every religious controversy, with very little tendency to produce conviction, so long as the true principle of their interpretation was disregarded. So long as texts are considered by themselves alone,—considered as independent passages, uncontrolled by any such principle, one text is as good as another; and thus Christian sects have presented the strange anomaly,—the wonder of observers, the scorn of infi-

dels—of being directly at issue on the clearest points of Christian doctrine, all armed with proof passages, all equally confident, and all with equal assurance condemning each other.

What is to account for this phenomenon ? There are other causes, indeed, but I am persuaded that the main cause lies in the peculiarity of treatment to which the Scriptures have been subjected. There is doubtless a superstructure of passion, prejudice, pride, and worldly interest ; but resting ostensibly, as it does on the Scriptures, there must be some error touching the very interpretation of them.

Let me now more distinctly state, what are the two principles or theories of interpretation, by which it is proposed to explain the language of Scripture on this subject. For the Trinitarian has his theory, his humanly devised theory, and his reasoning, and what he considers his rational principle of exposition, as much as the Unitarian. The difference is not, though it is often alleged, that the Unitarian relies more upon reasoning, independent of Scripture ; but, as I conceive, that he relies upon a more rational, a more natural, and a really sounder principle of interpretation. The Trinitarian says, — “here are two classes of passages, — those which describe an *inferior*, and those which describe a *superior* nature. We receive both classes without admitting any qualification, or limitation of sense in either. One class

of texts ascribes human qualities to Jesus; therefore, he is man; another ascribes divine works and offices; therefore, he is God; and we dare not explain them into what we might imagine to be a consistency with each other, as we should any other history, concerning any other person. We receive the contrasted portions of this history just as they stand; holding it to be not our business to explain, but only to believe."

By this theory, undoubtedly, the Trinity can be proved. By this theory a *double nature* in Christ can be proved. And by this theory, do I seriously aver that Transubstantiation, Anthropomorphism, and irreconcilable contradictions in the divine nature can be proved; Transubstantiation — the doctrine that the sacramental bread and wine are the real body and blood of Christ; for while, in one class of passages, these elements are called bread and wine; in another, doth not our Saviour say, "this is my body — this is my blood?" — Anthropomorphism — for while we are taught that God is a spirit, is he not said to have hands, eyes — to walk on the earth, &c.? — irreconcilable contradictions in his nature — for while we are taught that God is unchangeable, is he not represented as repenting, that he had made man — repenting, that he had made Saul king? Upon what principle is it, that such monstrous conclusions are avoided? Upon a principle, I answer, that is fatal to the Trinitarian theory of interpretation. It is the

principle that words are not to be taken by themselves in the Bible ; that limitations and qualifications in their meaning must be admitted, in order to make any sense ; that the Scriptures are, in this respect, to be interpreted like other books ; that when human language is adopted as the instrument of a divine communication, it may fairly be presumed that it is subject to the laws of that instrument ; and that no other principle of criticism can save the Bible, or any other book, from the imputation of utter absurdity and folly.

This I understand to be the Unitarian theory of interpretation. The reader will perceive at once that just this difference of theory will bring out precisely the difference of results, that characterize these two classes of believers. Which, then, is the true theory ?

It seems to me that the case speaks for itself ; that all common sense, all usage, all criticism, all tolerable commentary on the Bible, sufficiently declares which is the right principle.

But let us appeal to undeniable authority — that of the sacred teachers themselves — that of the Bible interpreting itself.

For the application of our principle of interpretation to the very subject before us, we have the authority of Jesus Christ himself ; and the application is as clear and decisive, as the appeal, with every Christian, must be final and ultimate. I allude to that most extraordinary passage, in

John x. 30–36, — most extraordinary I mean in reference to this controversy: and I propose to make it the subject of considerable comment and argument.

What is the question, in the passage here referred to? I answer, — the very question, which is now virtually before us, — did Jesus claim to be God? What was the language of our Saviour? “God is my Father: I and my Father are one.” What was the accusation of the Jews? “Thou blasphemest — and, being a man, makest thyself God:” — the very allegation on which Trinitarianism is founded. It was once a cavil: it is now a creed. And now I ask, in the name of reason and truth and Scripture, how does our Saviour treat it? His answer, be it remembered, in the first place, is a solemn and absolute *denial* of the allegation, that he had made himself God! “Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said ye are gods? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken, say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?” Our Saviour had used strong language concerning himself. He had said, “as the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father;” referring, however, as I suppose, not to the extent, but to the certainty of the knowledge. He had said, “I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took

up stones to cast at him ;” they accused him of blasphemy ; they said, “ thou makest thyself God.” Jesus denies that the language he had used warrants the inference they drew from it. This is the second point. He denies their inference. He clearly implies, moreover, that stronger language still would not warrant the inference. He tells the cavilling Jews, that even those “ to whom the word of God came ” had been “ called gods.” And then, so far from declaring himself to be God, he speaks of himself as one whom God “ had sanctified and sent into the world ;” and as, on that account, entitled to speak of himself in exalted terms.

And yet, how astonishing is it, we may observe, by the by, that this very language, “ I and my Father are one,” concerning which, and much stronger language too, he had declared its insufficiency to prove him God, — this very language, I say, and other similar phraseology, is constantly quoted to prove the Supreme Deity of the Son of God ! Words, once caught up by gainsayers, and by them wrested into a charge against our Saviour, of assuming Divinity, and denied by him to be any legitimate proof of such an allegation, now help to support the faith of multitudes in this very allegation, as a portion, and a most essential portion, of the Christian doctrine !

I say that our Saviour appeals to a principle of interpretation. Those, in ancient times, “ to whom

the word of God came," were men, ordinary men ; and when they were called gods, this language was limited in its force by their known character. No one could think of taking this language for what it meant by itself considered, and without any qualification. But our Saviour was an extraordinary personage, and he argues that words of much loftier import might be applied to him, without furnishing any warrant for the inference, that he was God ; and he absolutely contradicts the inference.

Let us now apply in another way the reasoning with which our Saviour confounded the Jews.

I suppose it will be admitted that the words, "I and my Father are one," do not prove our Saviour to be God ; since he himself expressly disallows the inference. Now, is there any language in the Bible concerning Christ, that is stronger than this ? Is there any of all the proof texts, that is stronger ? I confess that I know of none. This is the very language of the popular creed ; not that the Father and the Son are two Gods, but that they are one. And so exactly does it express the Orthodox belief, that, *notwithstanding* our Saviour's disclamation, it is constantly used to convey the idea that he was God. His disclamation, however, settles the matter entirely. And I suppose that an intelligent reasoner on the Trinitarian side, would say, — "it is true the words here used do not prove Jesus to be God. Still,

however, he may be God. He was reasoning with the Jews on a particular charge. The charge was, that he had, by *the language he used*, made himself God. He simply denies that this particular language warrants their inference." Is not this, however, at the least, a very extraordinary supposition? It makes our Saviour say with himself — "true I *am* God, and being so, I have used language very naturally expressive of that fact. However, I can reason it away with these people, on the ground of their own Scriptures, and I will do so. I *am* God, indeed; but I will deny this inference of the Jews, though it amounts to the exact truth. I will deny it, though I thereby mislead them altogether and infinitely, as to my true character." This, I say, would be our Saviour's reasoning with himself on the Trinitarian hypothesis. But the truth is, this supposition, improper and incredible as it is, will not save the doctrine. Because this language, which our Saviour declares insufficient to prove him God, is, in fact, as strong as any language that the advocates of that doctrine adduce. If this language does not fairly prove him to be God, then no language in the Bible does.

Let us suppose, to put this in another form, that the New Testament in all its doctrinal parts, — that is to say, that the Epistles had been written, and all had been completed before our Saviour's death; and that our Trinitarians could have said to him

after the manner of the Jews, "thy disciples, whom thou hast commissioned to declare the truth, make thee to be God." I conceive that Jesus might have given the same answer as he did to his Jewish accusers. He would say, "No ; in all writings it is common to speak of men according to their distinction ; nor is there any need, on the principles of ordinary interpretation and sense, of guarding and restraining the natural language of admiration and love. The ancient Jews were called gods, because the word of God came to them. And I, *on account of my Messiahship*, may properly be spoken of, and spoken of *in that character*, much more strongly."

But, to bind the argument more closely, and to render it, as I think, incontrovertible, let me add, that the matter which I now state is not a matter of supposition, but of fact. Jesus *is* spoken of, and that frequently, *in his simple character of Messiah*, — that is to say, *as* inferior — as confessedly inferior — as an *official* person he is spoken of as strongly as he is anywhere. Observe the following language — "For by him were all things created that are in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers, all things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." There is no stronger language than this. And yet, for all this, Jesus is represented as dependent on the good

pleasure of God. "*For — for* it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." I suppose this to be that moral creation, that creating anew of many souls, which Jesus by his doctrine has effected, together with that influence upon the visible kingdoms of the world, which his doctrine has unquestionably produced. Again; we read of Jesus Christ as being "far above principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come;" and again, I say, there is no stronger language than this. But it is expressly said, that God "set him above all principality," &c. How directly are we led back from these passages, to our Saviour's principle of interpretation! And as if there should be no doubt about the subordinate and temporary character of this distinction, high as it was, we are expressly told, that "when the end shall come," — when according to the Trinitarian hypothesis, we expect to see Jesus ascend to his primeval dignity as God — when "all things shall be subdued unto him," lo! "then shall he be subject unto him that put all things under him; that God may be all in all." And as if to warrant the very principle of interpretation, on which I am insisting — as if to show that nothing, that is said of the glory of our Saviour, is to be taken in derogation from the supremacy of God, it is said in this very connection, "But when it is said, *all* things are put under

him, *it is manifest* that he is excepted who did put all things under him." As if it were said — nay it is said — that nothing written concerning the greatness of Jesus is to bring into question the unrivalled supremacy of God.

And let me add, that this provides us with an answer to the only objection that stands in our way. It may be said that there are still passages, whose force is not controlled by any express qualification. I answer that it *is* nevertheless fairly controlled by the general sense of the book. The certain truth, that there is but one God ; the constant ascription of that supremacy to the Father, the constant declaration, that Jesus owed everything to God, justly limits the sense of those passages which ascribe to the Saviour a lofty distinction. This is according to the usage of all writings. Suppose that when the biographer had said of Bonaparte, that " his footstep shook the Continent," or of Mr. Pitt, that he " struck a blow in Europe, that resounded through the world," or the poet, of Milton, —

" He passed the flaming bounds of space and time,
The living throne, the sapphire-blaze ; "

suppose, I say, that he immediately added, and in every such instance added, that he did not mean to be taken literally — that he did not mean that the personage in question was a demi-god ; would anything be more unnatural and unnecessary ? Were any writings ever composed upon this plan ?

What then is the conclusion at which we arrive? The very objection which we are considering, in fact, gives up the whole argument. For it is admitted by this objection, that *if* the qualification had been constantly introduced — that is to say, if *every time* that any lofty distinction had been ascribed to Jesus, it had been expressly said that “God gave him this” — that “God had set him there” — it is admitted, I say, that by this constantly repeated qualification, the whole Trinitarian argument would have been completely overthrown. Is it possible then, for the Trinitarian expositor, interpreting the Bible on the same principle that he does other books, to maintain his argument? If he does so, I fearlessly assert, that he gives up the principle. The moment he feels the Trinitarian ground strong beneath him, that moment he abjures the principle in his exposition — that moment he begins to say, “it is profane to interpret the Scriptures, as we do other books, the Scripture biography, as we do other biographies.”

The fact is, and I must assert it, that the Trinitarian, with all his assumptions of exclusive reverence for the Bible, does *not* adhere to the Bible as his opponent does. If he would vindicate his claim, I should be glad to see a little more regard for Scripture usage in his doxologies and ascriptions. From all pulpits, at the close of almost every prayer, may be heard, on any Sunday, *for-*

mulas of expression like these — nowhere to be found in the Bible — “And to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory:” — “To the holy and ever blessed Trinity; one God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be equal and undivided honors and praises.”

And yet those who pass upon us such unscriptural theories, as we think them, and are constantly swaying the public mind, by using such confessedly unscriptural language, are, at the same time, perpetually charging us with rejecting the Bible and relying on our presumptuous reasonings, and with leaning, and more than leaning, to infidelity.

I repeat, in close, that the question between us is a question of interpretation. It is a question of “what saith the Scripture?” It amounts to nothing in view of this question, to tell me, that for many centuries the church has, in the body of it, believed this or that doctrine. The church, by the confession of us all, has believed many errors, for many centuries. It is worse yet, contemptuously or haughtily to say, that it is unlikely, any great or new truth in religion is now to be found out. Such a principle would stop the progress of the age. Such a principle would have crushed the Reformation. Neither is our doctrine new, nor is it unhonored, so far as human testimony can confer honor. It was the doctrine, as we firmly believe, of the primitive church. It has been held

by many good men ever since. And when you come upon English ground — when you retrace the bright lineage of our English worthies, to whom do all eyes turn as the brightest in that line? Whose names have become household words, in all the dwellings of a reading and intelligent community? I answer, the names of Newton, and Locke, and Milton; and yet Newton, who not only read the stars — and Locke, who not only penetrated with patient study the secrets of the mind — and Milton, who not only soared into the heaven of poetry, and “passed the sapphire blaze, and saw the living throne” — all of whom read their Bibles too, and wrote largely upon the Scriptures — all these, after laborious investigation, concurred in rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity. What these men believed, is not to be accounted of mushroom growth. They were men not of parts and genius only, but men of solid and transcendent acquisitions and ever-during fame. I would not name them in the spirit of vain and foolish boasting. But I do say — and I would urge this consideration particularly — I do say, that the extraordinary circumstance, that these three men have been as distinguished for their study of the Bible, as they have been otherwise distinguished among the great and learned men of England — that this circumstance should lead every man to pause, before he rejects a doctrine which they believed. Much more does it become men of infe-

rior parts and little learning, to abstain from pouring out contempt and anthemas upon a doctrine which Newton, and Locke, and Milton believed.

It is to little purpose, indeed, to lift up warnings and denunciations, and to awaken prejudice and hostility against the great doctrine on which Unitarianism is built — the simple Unity of God ; and the entire inferiority, yet glorious distinction, of Jesus, as his Son and Messenger. This doctrine professes to stand securely on the foundation of Scripture. Argument, therefore, not passion, must supply the only effectual weapons against it. If this doctrine be wrong, may God speedily show it ! If it be right, he will defend the right. Concerning all improper opposition, we might say to its opponents, in the words of Gamaliel, “ let it alone : for if this counsel, or this work, be of men, it will come to nought : but if it be of God, ye *cannot* overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found, even to fight against God.”

CURSORY OBSERVATIONS.

NO. III. ON THE ATONEMENT.

(I insert here, instead of the original article in the series, a sermon on the import and intent of the sufferings of Christ.)

I. COR. II. 2. FOR I DETERMINED NOT TO KNOW ANYTHING
AMONG YOU, SAVE JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED.

THE preëminence thus assigned to one subject of Christian teaching — the sufferings of Jesus — must command for it our serious attention. It is true that Paul did *not* mean to say, that he would not speak of anything but the passion of Christ; for he did speak of many other things. But it is quite clear that he did give to this subject, in the Christian system, an importance, preëminent — predominating over all others.

Why did he so? Why is the death of Jesus the highest subject in Christianity? Why is the cross the chiefest emblem of Christianity? Why has something like Paul's determination always been realized in the Christian church, — to know nothing else? Why has it been celebrated, as nothing else has been celebrated? Why has an

holy rite been especially ordained to show forth the death of Christ through all time? The brief answer to these questions is, that the substance, the subject-matter of Christianity, is the character of Christ, as the Saviour of men; and that the grandest revelation of his character and purpose was made on the cross. Of this revelation I am now to speak.

In entering upon this subject I feel one serious difficulty. It has taken such hold of the superstition of mankind, that it is difficult to present it in its true, simple, natural, and affecting aspects. For this reason, I shall not attempt to engage your minds in the ordinary course of a doctrinal discussion. I *cannot* discuss this solemn theme in a merely metaphysical manner. I cannot contemplate a death, and least of all the death of the Saviour, only as a doctrine. It is to me, I must confess, altogether another kind of influence. It is to me, if it is anything, power and grandeur; it is something that rivets my eye and heart; it is a theme of admiration and spiritual sympathy; it leads me to meditation, not to metaphysics; it is as a majestic example, a moving testimony, a dread sacrifice, that I must contemplate it. I see in it a death-blow to sin; I hear the pleading of the crucified One for truth and salvation, beneath the darkened heavens and amidst the shuddering earth!

I mean to say, that all this is spiritual and prac-

tical. It amazes me, that this great event, which is filling all lands and all ages, yea, and is to fill eternity with its presence, should be resolved altogether — all gathered and stamped into a formula of faith. It is every way astonishing to me, that such a speculative use should have been made of it; that suffering should have been seized upon as a subject for metaphysical analysis; that the agony of the Son of God should have been wrested into a thesis for the theologian; that a death should have been made a dogma; that blood should have been taken to write a creed; that Calvary should have been made the arena of controversy; that the cross, whereon Jesus, with holy candor and meekness, prayed for his enemies, saying, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!” — that the cross should have been made a rack of moral torture for his friends, whereon, in all the valleys and upon all the hills of Christendom, they have been crucified by unkindness and exclusion — is there another such contradiction — is there another such phenomenon to be found, in all the strange history of the world? There have been martyrdoms recorded in the the world’s great story; but when before were martyrdoms wrought into sharp and reproachful metaphysics? There have been fields drenched with righteous blood; there have been lowly and lonely valleys, like those of Piedmont and Switzerland, where the sighs and groans of the crushed and bleeding have risen and

echoed among the dark crags that surrounded them ; but who ever thought of building up these dread testimonies of human suffering and fortitude, into systems of doctrinal speculation ?

Let me not be misunderstood. In the train of the world's history, as I follow it, I meet at length with a being, marked and singled out from all others. I read, in the Gospel, the wonderful account of the most wonderful personage, that ever appeared on earth. Nothing, in the great procession of ages, ever bore any comparison with the majestic story that now engages my attention. I draw near and listen to this being, and he speaks as never man spake. By some strange power, which I never so felt before, he seems as no other master ever did, — he seems to speak to *me*. I follow him, as the course of his life leads me on. I become deeply interested, more than as for a friend, in everything he says, and does, and suffers. I feel the natural amazement at the resistance and hatred he meets with. I feel a rising glow in my cheek, at the indignities that are heaped upon him. I say with myself, “surely God will interpose for him !” I hear him speak obscurely of a death by violence ; but, like the disciples, I cannot receive it. I look, rather, that some horses and chariots of fire, shall come and bear him up to heaven. But the scene darkens around him ; more and more frequently fall from his lips the sad monitions of coming sorrow ; he

prepares a feast of friendship with his disciples, but he tells them that it is the last ; he retires thence to the shades of Gethsemane ; and lo ! through those silent shades comes the armed band ; he is taken with wicked hands ; he is borne to the Judgment-Hall ; he is invested with a bloody crown of thorns, and made to bear his cross amidst a jeering and insulting multitude ; he is stretched upon that accursed tree ; he expires in agony. Oh ! where are now the hopes, that he would do some great thing for the world ! He seemed as one, who would save the world, and lo ! he is crucified and slain ! He seemed to hold in his bosom the great regenerative principle ; he knew what was in man and what man wanted ; he appeared as the hope of the world ; and where now is that hope ? Buried, intombed, quenched in the dark and silent sepulchre. All is over—all, to my worldly view, is ended. I wander away from the scene in hopeless despair. I fall in company, as the narrative leads me on, with two of the scattered disciples going to Emmaus. And as we talk of these things, one joins us in our walk, and asks us what are these sad communings of ours. And we say, “ Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days ? And he says, what things ? And we answer, concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Then expounds he to us the Scriptures ; and says, ought not Christ to have suffered

these things and to enter into his glory ?” In fine, he reveals himself unto us, and then vanishes away. And we say, “did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures ?”

In short, it is at this point, that a new view enters my mind of the sufferings of Jesus. The worldly views all pass away — the worldly views of death and defeat, of ignominy and ruin ; and I see that through death it was, that Jesus conquered. I see that his dying, even more than his living, is a ministration of power, and light, and salvation to the world. I see that that ignominy is glory ; that those wounds are fountains of healing ; that the cross, hitherto branded as the accursed tree, fit only for the execution of the vilest culprits, has become the emblem of everlasting honor.

Now, therefore, the death of Jesus becomes to me the one great revelation. I determine to know nothing else — nothing in comparison with it ; nothing is of equal interest. All the glory of Christ’s example, all the graciousness of his purposes, shines most brightly on the cross. It is the consummation of all, the finishing of all. The epitaph of Jesus, is the epitome of Christianity. The death of Jesus is the life of the world.

In saying this, I wish to utter no theological dogma, which shall be respectfully received as a mere dogma. I simply express what is, upon my own mind, the natural impression. I stand by the

cross of Jesus — for no intervening ages can weaken the power of that manifestation — and what is its language to me? I will suppose myself to stand alone by that cross; I will suppose that I have never heard of any theological systems; I stand in the simplicity of the elder time, before any systems were invented. And what now is the first feeling that enters my mind, as I gaze upon that Sufferer?

I think I shall state the natural impression, taking into account all that I have known of Jesus, when I say that the first feeling is, that I am a sinner. It is ever the tendency of human guilt, on witnessing any great catastrophe, to exclaim, "I am a sinner." But this is not a catastrophe without an explanation. Let us see if my feeling is not right. I have heard all that Jesus has said of the supreme evil, that sin is. I have seen how that one conviction rested upon his mind, and breathed out in all his teachings, that nothing beside is comparatively an evil. I have seen that it was on this very account, that he came on a mission of pity from the Father of mercies. I have heard all that he has said — my heart has been probed by his words, and I involuntarily exclaim, as I see him suspended on the cross, "Ah! sinful being that I am — that such an one should suffer for me. It is I that deserved to suffer; but God hath made him the propitiation for my sins. Could nothing else set forth before me the curse of sin?"

Could no other hand bear the burden of my redemption? Truly, I have sinned against the gracious Father of my existence; I always knew it — I always felt that I had; but how is it shown to me now, when the love and pity of the infinite Father appears in this — that he spared not his own Son, but gave him to die for me. Oh! sore and bitter to abide are pains and wounds — cherished in heaven are the sufferings of martyred innocence! — how then does every pain of Jesus awaken the pain of conscious guilt in my mind! — how does every wound reveal a deeper wound in my soul! I will repent me now, if I never would before. I will resist — I can resist no longer. I will be crucified to sin, and sin shall be crucified to me. I will bathe the cross of Jesus with the tears of penitence. God, who hast interposed for me, help me to die daily unto sin, and to live unto righteousness!”

It is in this connexion, if anywhere, that we must give a few moments’ attention to the doctrinal explanation of the atonement. I have indeed remonstrated against the speculative use of this subject, but the state of the public mind makes it necessary, perhaps, that something should be said of the theory of the atonement.

I understand this, then, to be the state of the question. Two leading views of the sacrifice of Christ divide the Christian world. The one regards it as an expedient; the other as a manifes-

tation. According to the first view, the sacrifice of Christ is usually represented either as the suffering of a penalty, or as the payment of a debt, or as the satisfaction of a law. It is something that either turns God's favor towards us, or makes it proper for him to show favor. It is some new element, or some new expedient introduced into the divine government, without which it is impossible to obtain forgiveness. This, I understand to be, in general and in substance, the Calvinistic view. The other view regards the suffering of Christ, as simply a manifestation. It is not a purchase or procurement, but a manifestation of God's love and pity and willingness to forgive. It is not the enfranchisement from some legal bond of God's mercy, but the expression, the out-flowing of that mercy which was forever free. It was a satisfaction not to the heart of reluctant justice, but of abounding grace. The divine displeasure against sin, indeed, was manifested ; for how costly was the sacrifice for its removal ; but not a displeasure that must burn against the sinner till some expedient was found to avert it.

Now the view of manifestation is the one which we adopt ; and certainly many of the more modern Orthodox explanations come to the same thing. They still proceed, it is true, upon the presumption that this manifestation was intrinsically necessary — that sin could not have been forgiven without it ; that the authority of God's law could not

have been otherwise upholden. I certainly cannot take this view of the subject. I cannot undertake to say what it was possible or proper for the Almighty to do. I can only wonder at the presumption of those, who do profess thus to penetrate into the fathomless counsels of the Infinite Government. I read in the Gospel, it is true, of a necessity for the sufferings of Christ; but I understand it to be founded in prophecy, which must be fulfilled — founded in the moral purposes of his mission — founded in the wisdom of God. I read, that God is the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus — of him that is penitent and regenerate; that is, God treats him as if he were just — in other words, shows favor to him; bestows pardon and mercy upon him. And of this mercy Jesus, the sufferer, is the great and all-subduing manifestation.

I cannot here go into the details of interpretation. It is perplexed by reasonings of the Apostles about the relations of Jews and Gentiles, by analogies to the Jewish sacrifices, by the language and speculations of an ancient time; by difficulties, in short, that require much study and learning for their clearing up, and demand *no* solution at the hand of plain and unlearned persons, who are simply seeking for their salvation. This profound criticism, in short, is a subject for a volume, rather than for a sermon.

But I will present to you, in accordance with a

frequent practice of theologians, a single illustration, which if you will carry into the New Testament, you will see, I believe, that it explains most of the language you will find there.

Suppose, then, that a father, in a distant part x ? of the country, had a family of sons, all dear to him. Suppose that all of them, save one, who remained at home with him, had wandered away into the world to seek their fortunes, and that in the prosecution of that design, they had come to one of our cities. Suppose that, in process of time, they yield to the temptations that surround them, and become dissolute and abandoned, and are sunk into utter misery — first one, and then another, till all are fallen. From time to time, dark and vague rumors had gone back to their country home, that all was not well; and their parent had been anxious and troubled. He thought of it in sleepless nights; but what could he do? He desired one and another of his neighbors, going down to the great city, to see his sons, and tell him of their estate. On their return they speak to him in those reserved and doubtful terms, that sear a parent's heart: one messenger after another speaks in this manner; till at length, evasion is no longer possible, and the father learns the dreadful truth, that his sons are sunk into the depths of vice, debasement, and wretchedness. Then, at last, he says to his only remaining, and beloved son, "Go and save thy brethren."

Let me observe to you here, that nothing is more common in the books of Divinity, than comparisons of this nature ; and that it is not, of course, designed to imply anything in such comparisons of the relative rank of the parties. The father says, "go and save thy brethren." Moved by compassion, that son comes to the great city. He seeks his unhappy brethren in their miserable haunts ; he labors for their recovery. Ere long, a fearful pestilence spreads itself in the city. Shall the heroic brother desist from his task ? No ; he labors on ; night and day he labors ; till, in the noisome abodes of vice, poverty, and misery, he takes the infectious disease, and dies. He dies for the salvation of his brethren.

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Now what is the language of this sacrifice on the part of the father, what is it on the part of the son, and what is it to those unhappy objects of this interposition ?

On the part of the father, it was unspeakable compassion. It was also, constructively, an expression of his displeasure against vice — of the sense he entertained of the evil into which his sons had fallen. On the part of the son, it was a like conviction and compassion, and a willingness to die for the recovery of his brethren. What would it be to those guilty brethren ? What would it be especially, if by dying for them, he recovered them to virtue, restored them to their father's arms, and to a happy life ? "Ah ! our

brother" — they would say, "he died for us — he died that we might live. His blood has cleansed us from sin. By his stripes, by his groans, by his pains, we are healed. Dearly beloved brother! we will live in memory of thy virtues, and in honor of thy noble sacrifice." Nor, my friends, is there one word of reliance or gratitude in the New Testament applied to the sacrifice of Jesus, which persons thus circumstanced, and with a Jewish education, would not apply to just such an interposition as we have supposed. If, then, we have put a case which meets and satisfies all the Scriptural language to be explained, have we not put a case that embraces the essential features of the great atonement?

II. I have now spoken of the relation of the cross of Christ to our sins, and to the pardon of sin. But we should by no means have exhausted its efficacy, we should by no means have shown all the reasons of its preëminence in the Christian dispensation, if we were to stop here. Not less practical, not less momentous is its relation to our deliverance from sin. That, indeed, is its ultimate end, and pardon is to be obtained only on that condition. This idea, indeed, has been essentially involved in what we have already said; but it requires yet further to be unfolded.

The death of Jesus is the greatest ministration ever known on earth to human virtue. It was intended not to be a relief to the conscience, but

an incentive — a goad to the negligent conscience.

It was not meant, because Christ has died that men should roll the burden of their sin on him, and be at ease ; but that, more than ever, they should struggle with it themselves. It was designed that the cross should lay a stronger bond upon the conscience, even than the law. When I look upon the cross, I cannot indulge, my brethren, in sentimental or theologic strains of rapture, over reliefs and escapes ; over the broken bonds of legal obligation ; over a salvation wrought out *for* me, and not *in* me ; over a purchased and claimed pardon — as if now all were easy — as if a commutation were made with justice — the debt paid — the debtor free — and there were nothing to do, but to rejoice and triumph. No ; I should feel it to be base and ungenerous in me, thus to contemplate sufferings and agonies endured for my salvation. The cross is a most majestic and touching revelation of solemn and bounden duty. It makes the bond stronger, not weaker. It reveals a harder, not an easier way to be saved. That is to say, it sets up a stricter, not a looser law for the conscience. Every particle of evil in the heart is now a more lamentable and gloomy burden, than it ever was before. The cross sets a darker stamp upon the malignity of sin, than the table of the commandments, and it demands of us, in accents louder than Sinai's thunder, sympathetic agonies to be freed from sin.

The cross, I repeat, is the grand ministration to human virtue. It is a language to all lonely and neglected, or slighted and persecuted virtue. Often do we stand in situations where that cross is our dearest example and friend. It is, perhaps, beneath the humble roof, where the great world passes us by, and neither sees nor knows us; where no one blazons our patience, our humility, cheerfulness and disinterestedness, to the multitude that is ever dazzled with outward splendor. There must we learn of him, who for us was a neglected wanderer, and had not even where to lay his head. There must we learn of him, who was meek and lowly in heart, and find rest unto our souls. There must we learn of him, who bowed that meek and lowly head upon the cross — dishonored before a passing multitude, honored before all ages. Or we stand, perhaps, beneath the perilous eye of observation — of an observation not friendly, but hostile and scornful. We stand up for our integrity : we stand for some despised and persecuted principle in religion, or morals, or science. And it is hard to bear opprobrium and injury for this ; — hard, for the noblest testimony of our conscience; to bear the worst infliction of human displeasure. The dissenting physician, the dissenting philanthropist, the dissenting Christian, knows full well how hard it is. And there — keeping there our firm stand — must we look upon that cross, whereon hung one who was despised and rejected

of men — the scorned of earth, the favored and beloved of heaven. That stand for conscience, kept firmly, humbly, meekly, we must learn, is not mean and low ; it is the very grandeur of life ; it is the magnificence of the world. It is a world of misconstruction, of injury, of persecution : that cross is lifted up to stay our fainting courage, to fix our wavering fidelity, to inspire us with meekness, patience, forgiveness of enemies, and trust in God.

Again, the cross is a language to *all* tempted and struggling virtue. Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. Thou too art tempted. In high estate as well as in low, thou art tempted. Nay, and the misery and peril of the case is, that all estates are becoming low with thee ; all is sinking around thee, when temptation presses thee sore. When thou art tempted to swerve from the integrity of thy spirit or of thy life, and the perilous hour draws near, and thou reasonest with thyself, thou art in a kind of despair. Thou sayest that friends desert thee, and the world looks coldly on thee ; or thou sayest that thy passions are strong, and thy soul is sad, and thy state is unhappy, and it is no matter what befalls. Then it is, that to thy tempted and discouraged virtue Jesus speaks, and says, deny the evil thought, and take up thy cross and follow me. Behold my agony, behold my desertion, behold the drops of bloody sweat ; I shrink in the

frailty of nature, as thou dost, from the cup of bitterness, I pray that it may pass from me ; but I do not refuse it. There is worse to fear than pain, — *guilt* — failure in the great trial — the prostration of all thy nobleness before the base appliance of a moment's gratification — ay, the pain of all thy after life, for an hour's pleasure. Learn of me, that virtue does not always repose on a bed of roses. Oh ! no ; sharp pangs — sharp nails — piercing thorns, are for me ; wonder not thou, then, at the fiery trial in thy soul ; my sufferings emblem thine, so let my triumph : all can be endured for victory — holy victory — immortal victory.

Once more ; the cross appeals to all heroic and lofty virtue. Let me say heroic ; though that word is scarcely yet found in the Christian's vocabulary. But in the Christian's life there is to be a heroism. He is to feel as one who has undertaken a lofty enterprise. He has entered upon a sublime work. It is his being's task, and trial, and triumph. We think too poorly of what a Christian life is. We hold it to be too commonplace. There is nothing heroic or lofty, as to the principle, in all history, in all the majestic fortunes of humanity, but is to come into the silent strife of every Christian's spirit.

Now to this, the example of the crucified Saviour is an emphatic appeal. The cross is commonly represented as humbling to the human

heart ; it is so to the worldly pride of the human heart ; but it is also to that heart, an animating, soul-thrilling, ennobling call. It speaks to all that is sacred, disinterested, self-sacrificing in humanity. I fear that we regard Christ's sacrifice for us so technically, that we rob it of its vital import. It *was* a painful sacrifice for us, as truly as if our brother had died for us ; it was a bitter and bloody propitiation, to bring back offending man to his God ; it was a groan for human guilt and misery that rent the earth ; it was a death endured for us, that we might live — and live forever. I speak not one word of this technically ; I speak vital truth. Even if Jesus had died as any other martyr dies ; if he had thought of nothing but his own fidelity — had thought of nothing, but bearing witness to the truth ; still the call would, *by inference*, have come to us. But it is not left to inference. Jesus was commissioned to bear this very relation to the world. He knew that if he were lifted up, he should draw all men to him. And how draw all men to him ? Plainly, in sympathy, in imitation, in love. He designed to speak to all ages, to touch all the high and solemn aspirations of unnumbered millions of souls ; to win the world to the noble spirit of self-sacrifice ; to disinterestedness, and fortitude, and patience ; to meekness, and candor, and gentleness, and forgiveness of injuries. This is the heroism of Christianity. In these virtues, centres all true glory.

This did Jesus mean to illustrate. His purpose was, to turn off the eyes of men from the power, pride, ambition, and splendor of the world, to the true grandeur, dignity, and all-sufficing good of love, meekness, and disinterestedness. And how surely have his purposes and predictions been accomplished ! A renovating power has gone forth from him upon the face of the whole civilized world, and is fast spreading itself to the ends of the earth. And one emphatic proof of this is, that the cross, before the stigma of the vilest crimes, has become the emblem of all spiritual greatness.

At the risk of wearying your patience, my brethren, let me invite you to a brief consideration of one other relation of the cross of Christ ; I mean its relation to human happiness. It shall be a closing and a brief one.

Jesus was a sufferer : and yet so filled was his mind with serenity and joy, that the single instance, in which we read that he wept, seems to open to us a new light upon his character. Jesus was a patient, cheerful, triumphant sufferer. The interest, which in this light his character possesses for the whole human race, has never, it appears to me, been sufficiently illustrated.

We are all sufferers. At one time or another, in one way or another, we all meet this fate of humanity. So true is this, and so well do we know it to be true, that it would be only too painful to open the wide volume of proofs which life

is continually furnishing. It is really necessary to lay restraint upon our thoughts, when speaking of the pains and afflictions of life. I know it is often said, that the pulpit is not sufficiently exciting. But how easy were it, to make it more so ! A thoughtful man will often feel, that instead of cautiously and considerately touching the human heart, he might go into that heart, with swords and knives, to cut, to wound, and almost to slay it, if such were his pleasure. What if he were to describe suffering infancy, or a sick and dying child, or the agony of parental sorrow, or manhood in its strength, or matronage in its beauty, broken down under some infliction, touching the mind or the body, to more than infant weakness—who could bear it ? Yes ; it is the lot of humanity to suffer. No condition, no guarded palace, no golden shield, can keep out the shafts of calamity. And especially it is the lot of intellectual life to suffer. As man becomes properly man ; as his mind grapples with its ordained probation, the dispensation naturally presses harder upon him. The face of careless childhood may be arrayed with perpetual smiles ; but behold, how the brow of manhood, and the matronly brow, grows serious and thoughtful, as years steal on ; how the cheek grows pale, and what a meaning is set in the depths of many an eye around you—all proclaiming histories, long histories, of care, and anxiety, and disappointment, and affliction !

Now into this overshadowed world, One has come, to commune with suffering — to soothe, to relieve, to conquer it: himself a sufferer — himself acquainted with grief — himself the conqueror of pain — himself made perfect through sufferings; and teaching us to gain like virtue and victory. For in all this, I see him ever calm, patient, cheerful, triumphant.

And what a touching aspect does all this strong and calm endurance lend to his afflictions. For he *was* afflicted, and his soul was sometimes “sorrowful, even unto death.” When I read, that at the grave of Lazarus, “Jesus wept;” when I hear him say, in the garden of Gethsemane, “Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me;” when from the cross arose that piercing cry, “my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me;” I know that he suffered. I know that loneliness, and desertion, and darkness were upon his path; I feel that sorrow and fear sometimes touched, with a passing shade, that seraphic countenance.

But oh! how divinely does he rise above all! What a peculiarity was there in the character of this wonderful Being; the rejected, the scorned, the scourged, the crucified: and yet no being was ever so considerate towards the faults of his friends, as he was towards the hostility of his very enemies; no being was ever so kindly and compassionate in spirit, so habitually even and cheerful in temper; so generous and gracious in manner. I can-

not express the sense I have of his equanimity, of his gentleness, of the untouched beauty and sweetness of his philanthropy, of the unapproached greatness of his magnanimity and fortitude. He looked through this life, with a spiritual eye, and saw the wise intent and beneficent effect of suffering ; he looked up with confiding faith to a Father in heaven ; he looked through the long and blessed ages beyond this life ; and earth, with all its scenes and sorrows, shrunk to a point, amidst the all-surrounding infinity of truth, and goodness, and heaven.

Thus, my brethren, has he taught us how to suffer. He has resolved that dark problem of life ; how that suffering, in the long account, may be better than ease ; and poverty, better than riches ; and desertion, better than patronage ; and mortification, better than applause ; and disappointment, better than success ; and martyrdom, better than all honors of a sinful life ; and how, therefore, that suffering is to be met with a brave and manly heart, with a sustaining faith, with a cheerful courage — counting it all joy, and making it all triumph.

Thus have I attempted — and I feel that I ought not to detain you longer — I have attempted, however imperfectly, to unfold the intent for which Jesus suffered ; to unfold the import and teaching of the cross of Christ to human guilt, to human virtue, and to human happiness. May

you know more of the truth as it is in Jesus, than words can utter, or worldly heart conceive ! And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. Amen.

CURSORY OBSERVATIONS.

NO. IV. ON THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM.

THE celebrated *five points* of Calvinism are the following ;—total depravity, election, particular redemption, irresistible grace, and the final perseverance of saints. It has been justly observed, that “the two first only are fundamental doctrines—the three last necessary consequences.” The consequences, however, are none the less liable to their separate and particular objections. But as I propose to confine myself to questions at *issue* between Orthodox and Liberal Christians, I shall not think it necessary to offer anything more than a passing remark or two, on the doctrines of particular redemption, and the saints’ perseverance.

Particular redemption, or the limitation of the atonement, both in its design and efficacy, *to the elect*, is a doctrine which has long since been discarded by the Congregationalists of this country. Indeed, these churches are about as improperly called *Calvinistic*, as they are, in common parlance among the mass of our people, denominated

Presbyterian. It is worth while to remark, though it be only for the sake of correcting a verbal inaccuracy, that there are not above a dozen or twenty *Presbyterian* churches in all New England; the word Presbyterian properly standing for a form of church government, not for a faith. And it is more important to observe, for the sake of correcting an error in the minds of the people, that there is probably, in strictness of speech, *not one Calvinistic Church* in the ancient dominion of the Puritans. Every one of the *five points* has been essentially modified—has been changed from what it originally was.

But to return;—the doctrine of particular redemption deserves to be noticed, as an instance of that attempt at *mathematical precision*, which, as I think, is a distinguishing trait of Calvinism, and which has done so much harm to the theological speculations of this country. I shall have occasion to refer to this kind of reasoning again. In the instance before us, it appears in the following statement. Sinners, it was said, had incurred a debt to divine justice; they owed a certain amount of suffering. Jesus Christ undertook, in behalf of the elect, to pay this debt. Now, if he had suffered more,—paid more, than was necessary to satisfy this particular demand, there would have been a waste of suffering, a waste of this transferable merit. But there *was* no such waste; the suffering exactly met the demand; and there-

fore the redemption was *particular*; it was limited to the elect—no others *could* be saved, without *another* atonement. This was, once, *theological reasoning*! And to dispute it, was held to be intolerable presumption. Such presumption severed, for a time, the New England churches from their southern brethren. Such a dispute, with one or two others like it, came near to rending the Presbyterian Church asunder.*

Let us now say a word, on the doctrine of *the saints' perseverance*. If you separate from this the idea of an irresistible grace, impelling, and, as it were, compelling Christians to persevere in piety and virtue, there is little, perhaps, to object to it. It *is* so separated in the *present* Orthodox belief, and therefore, it is scarcely a question in controversy. We all believe, that a man, who has become once thoroughly and heartily interested in the true Gospel, doctrine, character, and glory of Jesus Christ, is *very* likely to persevere and grow in that interest. I confess, that my own conviction on this point is very strong, and scarcely falls short of any language in which the doctrine of perseverance is declared. I can hardly conceive, how a man, who has once fully opened his eyes upon that "Light," should ever be willing to close them. And I believe, that in proportion as the Gospel is

* At length they have severed it; and we have two General Assemblies contending for precedence before the Civil Courts.

understood and felt — felt in all its deep fountains of peace and consolation, understood in all its yet coming revelations and unfoldings of purity and moral beauty — that in proportion to this, the instances of “falling away,” whether into infidelity or worldliness, will be more and more rare. I am aware, however, and think it ought to be said, that the common statements of the doctrine of perseverance are dangerous to the unreflecting and to the speculative. The truth is, that we ought to have nothing to do with perseverance as a doctrine, and everything with it, as a fact. Good men shall persevere — good Christians, above all, shall persevere ; but let them remember that they can do so, only by constant watchfulness, endeavor, self-denial, prayer, fidelity.

I shall now take up the more important subjects named at the head of this article.

The first is *total depravity*, including, of course, the position that this depravity is *native*.

I shall say nothing, in the few brief hints I have now to offer, of the practical views, which we all ought deeply to consider, of the *actual depravity* of man. I am concerned at present, then, only with the speculative and abstract doctrine of native, total depravity. And I am anxious, in the first place, to state it, in such a manner, as shall be unexceptionable to its most scrupulous advocate. It is not, then, according to modern explanations, that man is unable to be good ; or that he is as

bad as he can be ; or that his natural appetites, sympathies, and instincts are originally bad. I have known the distinction to be put in this way ; that man is totally depraved, in the *theological sense* of those words, but not in the common and classical sense of them, as they are used in our English literature, and in ordinary conversation : — a very good distinction, but a very bad precedent and principle for all fair reasoning. For if men are allowed to apply to common words this secret, technical, theological meaning, their speculations can neither be understood, nor met, nor subjected to the laws of common sense. It is not safe in moral reasonings, to admit two kinds of depravity, or two kinds of goodness. Men will be too ready to find out, that it is easier to be good, according to one theory of goodness, than according to another. And, it has too often come to pass, that *regenerated* and *sanctified*, (the theological words,) have not meant, pure, humble, amiable, and virtuous. And so, on the other hand, a man may much more easily and calmly admit that he is depraved, in the theological, than in the common sense. And in making this distinction, he deprives himself of one of the most powerful means of conviction. There is a great deal of truth in that *theory* of moral sentiments, though it does not go to the bottom of the subject, which maintains that a man learns to condemn and reproach himself, *through sympathy* with that feeling of

others, which condemns and reproaches him. But of this, by his peculiar and secret idea of depravity, the reasoner in question deprives himself. And hence it is, that such a man can talk loudly and extravagantly of his own depravity. It is because he does not use that word in the ordinary sense, nor feel the reproach that attaches to it. It is hence that congregations can calmly and indifferently listen to those charges of utter depravity, which, if received in their *common* acceptance, would set them on fire with resentment.

But the distinction does not much tend, after all, to help the matter, as a doctrine, though it does tend so nearly to neutralize it as a conviction; because, it is still contended, that the theological sense is the true sense. When the advocate of this doctrine says, that men are utterly depraved, he means that they are so, in the only true, in the highest sense of those words. And when he says, that this depravity is native, he means to fix the charge, not, indeed, upon the *whole* nature of man, not upon his original appetites and sympathies, but upon his highest, his *moral* nature. He means to say, that his moral nature—and nothing else, strictly speaking, *can* be sinful or holy—that his *moral* nature produces nothing but sin; that all which *can* sin in man *does* sin, and does nothing *but* sin, so long as it follows that tendency which is originally communicated to his nature. He means to say, that sin is

as truly and certainly the fruit of his moral nature, as *thought* is the fruit of his *mental* nature. And it makes no difference to say that he sins freely, for it is just as true that he thinks freely. In fact, he is not free to *cease* from doing either. In this view, indeed, depravity comes nothing short of an absolute inability to be holy. For if the moral constitution of man is so formed, as naturally to produce nothing but sin, I see not how he can any more help sinning, than he can help thinking. I do not forget that it is *said*, that man *has* the moral power to be holy; for I am glad to admit any modification in the statement of the doctrine. But, in fact, what does it amount to? What is a moral power to be good, but a *disposition* to be so? And if no such disposition is allowed to belong to human nature, I see not in what intelligible sense any *power* can belong to it.*

I will not pursue this definition of human depravity farther into those metaphysical distinctions and subtleties, to which it would lead. But I would now ask the reader, as a matter of argument, whether he can believe, that the simple and practical

* I believe that this is still the prevailing view of human depravity: but I should not omit, perhaps, to notice that, since these essays were written, another modification of the doctrine has been proposed. It is, that sin is not the necessary result of man's moral constitution, but the invariable result of his moral condition. There is little to choose. In either case, sin, and sin only, is inevitably bound up with human existence.

teachers of our religion ever thought of settling any of these nice and abstruse questions? For it is not enough for Orthodox believers on this point, that we admit the Scripture writers to have represented human depravity as exceedingly great and lamentable; *that* they undoubtedly did; but the Orthodox interpreter insists, that they meant to represent it, with metaphysical exactness, as *native* and *total*. He insists, that they meant *just so much*. That they meant a great deal, I repeat, is unquestionable; that they used phraseology of a strong and unlimited character, is admitted; but to draw from writings, so marked with solemn earnestness and feeling, certain precise and metaphysical truths,—to extract dogmas from the bold and heart-burning denunciations of prophets,—to lay hold of weapons of controversy in the sorrowful and indignant reproaches of those, who wept over human wickedness, seems to me preposterous. Surely, if any one of us were speaking of some very iniquitous practice, of some abominable traffic, or of some city or country whose wickedness cried to heaven, we should speak strongly, we should exhaust our language of its strongest epithets; it would be perfectly natural to do so: but, *as* surely, the last thing, we should think of, would be that of laying down a doctrine: the last thing, we should think of, would be that of philosophizing, and propounding theoretic dogmas upon the nature of the soul! And, to make the

case parallel, I may add, that we should by no means think of charging every or any individual, in such a country, or city, or company, with *total* and *native* depravity. I know, there will be some to say, but they will not be the really intelligent and thinking, that *our* language and *Scripture* language are different things. Let them be different in as many respects as any one pleases; but they must not be different in this. *All language is to be interpreted by the same general principles.* He, who does not admit this, has not taken the first step in true theology, and is not to be disputed with on this ground; but must be carried back to consider "what be the first principles" applicable to such inquiries.

As a matter of argument, *out* of the Scriptures, I will ask but one further question, and then leave the subject. I ask the Calvinist to say, from what source he originally derived his *ideas of moral qualities*—whence he obtained his *conceptions* of goodness, holiness, &c? I am certain, that neither he nor any man has obtained these *conceptions* of moral qualities from anything but the *experience* of them. A man could no more conceive of goodness, without having felt it, at some moment, and to some extent, than he could have an idea of colors, without seeing them. No description, no reasoning, no comparison could inform him either of the one or the other. A man does not approve of what is right, by *any reason-*

ing — whether upon utility, or the fitness of things, or upon anything else — but by simple consciousness. This is the doctrine of our most approved moral philosophers. But, consciousness of what ? Of the qualities approved, plainly. A man must *have* a right affection before he can approve it — before he can know anything about it. Does not this settle the question ? A *totally* and *natively* depraved being could have no idea of rectitude, or holiness, and by consequence, no idea of the moral character of God. And it has, therefore, been rightly argued, by some who have held the doctrine we are discussing, that men naturally have no such ideas. But I will not suppose that this is a position to be contended against ; since it would follow, that men are commanded, on peril and pain of all future woes, to love a holiness and a moral perfection of God, which they are not merely unable to love, but of which, according to the supposition, they have no conception !

The two remaining points to be considered are *election* and *irresistible grace*, or the divine influence on the mind. I take these together, because I have one principle of scriptural interpretation to advance, which is applicable to them both. And as I do not remember to have seen it brought forward, in discussions of this nature, and as it seems to me, an unquestionably just principle, I shall take up some space to explain it.

It must be admitted, that very strong and point-

ed language is used in the New Testament, concerning election, and God's spirit or influence in the human heart. And I think it is apparent that the Arminian opposers of these doctrines have betrayed a consciousness, that they had considerable difficulties to contend with. They have seemed to be aware that the language of Scripture, which their Calvinistic adversaries quote, is strong, and they have shown some disposition to lessen its force, or to turn it into vague and general applications. Now, for my own part, I find no difficulty in admitting the whole force and personal bearing of these representations, though I cannot receive them in the form which Calvinism has given them. And I make this exception, too, not because I am opposed to the strength and directness of the Calvinistic belief, but because I am opposed, in this, as in other respects, to the metaphysical and moral principles of the system. In short, I believe in personal election, and the influence of the Almighty Spirit on the mind: and this, or what amounts to this, I suspect all Christians believe. For, an "election of communities," as some interpret it, is still an election of the individuals that compose them. And an "election to privileges," as others prefer to consider it, is still making a distinction, and a distinction on which salvation depends. If it be said that an "election to privileges" saves the doctrine of human freedom; so, I answer, must any election save the doctrine of

human freedom, but that of the fatalist. And the same may be said of divine influence.

Let us, then, go to the proposed principle of interpretation, which, I confess, relieves my own mind, and I hope it may other minds.

I say, then, that *the apostles wrote for their subject*. It is a well established principle among the learned, though too little applied, that the apostles wrote for their age — with particular reference, that is, to the circumstances of their own times. I now maintain, in addition to this, *that they wrote for their subject*. Their subject, their exclusive subject, was religion ; and the principles of the divine government, which they apply to *this* subject, may be equally applicable to everything else. Their *not saying*, that these principles have such an application, does not prove that they have not ; because they wrote for their subject, and it was not their business to say so. In other words, God's government is infinite ; and they speak but of one department of it. His foreknowledge and his influence are unbounded ; they speak of this foreknowledge and influence, but in one single respect. But instead of limiting the application of their principles to this one department, and this one respect, the inference would rather be, that they are to be extended to everything. And in fact this extension of the principle with regard to election, (in one instance, and I believe, only one,) *is* hinted at, where the apostle

says, that Christians are “predestinated according to the purpose of him, *who worketh all things — after the counsel of his own will.*” If this be true, then, *everything* is a matter of divine counsel; *everything* is disposed of by election. And men are as much elected to be philosophers, merchants, or inhabitants of this country or that country, as they are elected to be Christians. If this is election, I believe there will be found no difficulty in it, — save what exists in that inscrutableness of the subject, which must forbid our expecting ever to fathom it.

It will be apparent from this view, in what I differ from Calvinists. They make that foreknowledge and purpose of God, which relate to the religious *characters of men*, a peculiarity in the divine government. Connecting the doctrine of election, as they do, with that of special grace, they leave an impression unfavorable to human exertion, and to the divine impartiality. But I maintain, without denying the general difficulties of the subject, that the religious part of the character is no more the result of the divine prescience and purpose, than any other part; and we have no more reason to perplex ourselves with this department of the divine government, than with any other.

Our principle admits of a fuller illustration on the subject of *divine influence*. I say that the apostles wrote for their subject, and wrote so

exclusively for it, that no inference is to be raised, from their *silence*, against applying their principles to other subjects. And I will present an illustration of this argument, to which no one, who respects the authority of Scripture, can object. Look, then, at the inspired writers of old. Writing as they did, under a long established form and dispensation of religion, they took a freer and wider range of subjects. And thus they extended the doctrine of divine influence to everything. They applied it much more frequently to outward things, than to the mind ; and much more frequently to the common business of life, than to religion. Nay, they asserted the necessity of this influence, in the common affairs of life, as strongly as the New Testament writers do, in the spiritual concerns of religion. They as much, and as strongly asserted, that men *could not succeed*, in business, or in study, in agriculture, in the mechanic arts, or in seeking after knowledge, without God's aid and influence, as our Christian teachers assert, that men cannot grow in grace and piety, without that aid and influence.— But, now, observe how different was the situation of the New Testament writers. They had no leisure, if I may speak so, to turn aside to the common affairs of life. They were obliged to put forth every energy for the propagation and defence of a new faith. They had no time, for instance, to prepare general and abstract pieces of devotion, as many of the Psalms are ; or

books of maxims and apothegms, like the Proverbs ; or highly wrought moral dialogues, like the Book of Job. They had no time to descant on matters of speculative morality, the prudence of life, and the diversified ways of Providence. Religion — religion, as a matter of evidence and experience, was the great engrossing theme. And hence they have spoken of that divine influence and superintendence, which really extend to all things — they have spoken of them, I say, especially and chiefly *in relation to religion*. But it would be as unjustifiable and unsafe, from this circumstance, to limit the doctrine of divine influence to religious matters, as it would be, from consulting the *ancient* records, to limit it to outward nature, and the common affairs of life. The only safe rule, whether in reasoning, or for devotion, is to extend it to all things.

In all this, I am aware that I am asserting nothing that is new. I am only attempting to free the subject from those difficulties, that have arisen from the *peculiarity* of the New Testament communications. I repeat it, that, in the principles, there is nothing new or peculiar. All good Christians have believed, and must believe, that the wise counsel and holy providence of God extend to everything. We must all believe, in some sense, in *election* and *divine influence*. But we have very unreasonably suffered ourselves to be perplexed with the speculative difficulties of this subject.

We have gone beyond our depth, and have lost our standing. How can we expect to fathom the infinite counsel and providence of heaven!

But the principal difficulty and danger to most minds, I suspect, have arisen from their attaching too much *peculiarity* to the counsel and influence of the Almighty, in the matters of religion. They have said, "if I am elected, I shall certainly be saved; and if I am not, it is in vain for me to try. And if God's Spirit works within me the work of faith, I have nothing to do myself." Now, let them extend their views of this subject;—and they will be safe, and ought to be satisfied. But, at any rate, they will be safe. They will be effectually guarded from the abuse of these doctrines. For as no one will expect to be a physician, or a philosopher, without study, because he hopes or imagines, that he is fore-ordained, or will be supernaturally assisted, to gain eminence in these professions, so neither will any similar hope of being a Christian, and being saved, lessen the exertions that are suitable to that end. With these views of the doctrines, in question, *common sense* may be trusted to guard them from perversion.

I said that the danger was of attaching *too much* peculiarity to that counsel and influence of God, which are connected with our salvation. Nevertheless, *something* of this nature, I apprehend, is to be ascribed to them. I distrust single views of subjects. It arises, I believe, from the

imperfection and weakness of our minds, that our whole mental vision is apt to be engrossed with seeing a truth in one point of light. Separate views must be combined, to form a just and well-proportioned faith. This, above all things, is liable to be forgotten amidst the biasses of controversy. We may take the larger view of the subjects before us, and yet we may admit that God does especially interpose in behalf of religious beings, weak and tempted as we are. And we may admit, that it has especially pleased him — that it is a counsel most agreeable to his nature, to bring good out of evil, to bring good men out of this world of temptations. I believe both. It does not perplex nor disturb me, but it calms and it comforts me, to believe that the good and merciful Spirit of God is all around me, and can interpose for me and assist me, in my times of trouble, and temptation, and peril. And it does not pain me, but it imparts satisfaction to my mind to believe, that the counsel, which has designed the highest good to its obedient offspring, is an eternal counsel !

If, now, on the whole, it be said that these views, which have been offered, lessen the importance, or the reality of God's counsel and providence, we maintain on the contrary, that they assert them in the highest degree ; that they carry them into all things, and thus directly lead to devotion ; that they serve, therefore, the grandest purpose of religious instruction, by bringing God,

in his power and his mercy, near to us — by impressing a sense of our dependence on him, and our unspeakable obligations to him, at every moment, and every step — for every attainment and blessing of life. This is the religious frame of spirit that we most need to gain — to feel, that God is near to us — that he upholds and blesses us; that he is near to us always; that all things are filled with his presence; that the universe around us is not so much a standing monument, as a living expression of his goodness; that all which we enjoy is not so much benevolence, sending down its gifts from afar to us, as it is the energy of his love working within us.

This, then, is the practical result of our reflections — that God is all in all; that his ever-living mercy, and his ever-working power pervade all things; that they are in all height and in all depth, in what is vast and what is minute, in the floating atom, and the rolling world, in the fall of a sparrow to the ground, and in the great system of the universe — in the insect's life, and in the soaring spirit of the archangel.

It is in Him, that each of us lives, and moves, and has his being, If we have gained any blessings of life, and if we have made any acquisition of knowledge, it is from him. And especially, if we have made any attainments in piety; if we are learning the great lesson of life, and that which prepares us for another and a better; if we are

learning to be devout and pure in heart — to be affectionate, and forbearing, and patient, and penitent, and forgiving ; if the dew of a heavenly influence is descending upon us, and the fruits of virtue and goodness are springing up within us ; if the universe is ministering to our devotion, — if religion, with every kind and gracious power, has visited us, and has become our friend, and guide, and comforter, — the employment, and happiness, and end of our being — Oh ! this is an emanation from the Divinity — a beam of heaven's own light — an expression of God's mercy, that demands our highest and tenderest gratitude. Thus, if we would come to the great practical result of all religious truth, let us be convinced, and feel, that "God is all in all." "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things ; — and to him — to him who made us, and blesses us, and guides us to heaven — to Him be glory for ever and ever."

CURSORY OBSERVATIONS.

NO. V. ON FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

I HAVE hesitated about introducing this subject, in the present course of observations, because there is no question upon it that does, accurately speaking, divide Orthodox and Liberal Christians. The great question, about the duration of future punishment, has been brought very little into debate between the parties, and it has no particular connexion with any of the speculative questions that *are* in debate. If Universalism, considered as a denial of all future punishment, has more affinity with any one theological system than another, it undoubtedly is Calvinism; and it is a well known fact, that it originally sprung from Calvinism, and existed in the closest connexion with it.

Still, however, since it is latterly urged, by the Orthodox, that there is a great difference between them and their opponents, on this subject, and since, as I apprehend, a difference does exist in their general views and speculations, and one that

deserves to be discussed, I have thought proper to bring it into the course of my remarks.

As the subject has been very little discussed among us, I shall treat it, not so much in the form of controversy, as with that calm and dispassionate disquisition, which more properly belongs to a theme so solemn and weighty.

I. The retribution of guilt is serious in the contemplation, and must be severe in the endurance. *The penal suffering of a guilty mind, wherever, and whenever it comes, must be great.* This, to me, is the first and clearest of all truths, with regard to the punishment of sin. Even experience teaches us this ; and Scripture, with many words of awful warning, confirms the darkest admonitions of experience. If sin is not repented of, in this life, then its punishment must take place in a future world.

Of the miseries of that future state, I do not need the idea of a direct infliction from God, to give me a fearful impression. Of all the unveiled horrors of that world nothing seems so terrific, as the self-inflicted torture of a guilty conscience. It will be enough to fill the measure of his woe, that the sinner shall be left to himself—that he shall be left to the natural consequences of his wickedness. In the universe, there are no agents to work out the misery of the soul, like its own fell passions ; not the fire, the darkness, the flood, or the tempest. Nothing, within the range of our

conceptions, can equal the dread silence of conscience, the calm desperation of remorse, the corroding of ungratified desire, the gnawing worm of envy, the bitter cup of disappointment, the blighting curse of hatred. These, pushed to their extremity, may be enough to destroy the soul—as lesser sufferings, in this world, are sometimes found to destroy the reason.

But whatever that future calamity will be, I believe it is the highest idea we can form of it, to suppose that it is of the sinner's own procuring; that the burden of his transgressions will fall upon him, by its own weight; not be hurled upon him, as a thunder-bolt from heaven. If we should suppose a wicked man to live always on earth, and to proceed in his career of iniquity, adding sin to sin, arming conscience with new terrors, gathering and enhancing all horrible diseases and distempers, and increasing and accumulating the load of infamy and woe—this might give us some faint idea of the extent to which sin may go in another world.

This, then, is not a subject to be treated lightly, or with any heat or passion; but should be taken home to the most solemn contemplations and deep solicitude of every accountable being.

II. My second remark is, that the scriptural representations of future punishment *are not literal nor definite.*

That they are not literal is manifest from the

consideration, that they are totally inconsistent, if taken literally. If there is a lake of fire, there cannot be a gnawing worm. If it is blackness of darkness, it cannot be a flaming deluge of fire. If it is death and destruction, literally, it cannot be sensible pain. If it is the loss of the soul, it cannot be the suffering of the soul. And yet all these representations are used to describe the future misery. It is plain, therefore, that all cannot be literally true. To suppose them literal, indeed, would be to make the future world like the present ; for they are all drawn from present objects. Neither are these representations definite. It is not a definite idea, but “ a certain fearful looking-for of judgment,” that is given to us, in the present state. We know nothing about the particular place, or the particular circumstances of a future punishment. If these things are not literally described, it follows, indeed, that they are not definitely. For, the moment these descriptions cease to be literal, they cease to furnish ideas of anything that is tangible — of anything that can belong to place or circumstance — of anything that has dimensions, shape, or elements. That is to say, they are figurative. They serve but to throw a deeper shadow over the dark abyss ; and leave us, not to pry into it with curiosity, but to tremble with fear. Indeed, the very circumstance, that the *future woe is unknown*, is, in itself, a most awful and appalling circumstance. It may be, that the

revelation of it comes to us in general and ambiguous terms, for this very purpose. There is really something more alarming in a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, than in the definite knowledge of it.

Neither, as I believe, are those terms, which describe the *duration* of future misery, definite. Indeed, why should they be more definite, than those which relate to place or circumstance? In passages where all else is figurative, and that in so very high a degree, why may it not be suspected that what relates to the time may be figurative? This suspicion, drawn from the connected phraseology, may derive additional strength from the subject, about which the language in question is employed. It is the future, the indefinite, the unknown state. Whatever stretches into the vast futurity, is to us eternal. We can grasp no thought of everlasting, but that it is indefinite. You may bring this argument home to your own feelings, if you suppose that you had been called to describe some future and awful calamity, which was vast, indefinite, unknown, terrible — if you consider whether you would not, with *these* views, have adopted phraseology as strong, as unlimited, as you find in the Scriptures on this subject. If, then, our idea of future punishment extends so far as to provide for the full strength of the language used — if our theory provide for the terms to be explained by it, is it not sufficient? — does it not go far enough?

To these considerations, relating to the language and the principles of interpretation that ought to be applied to it, let it be observed in addition, that the oriental style was habitually and very highly metaphorical, and is to be explained by the impression it would naturally make on those who were accustomed to it; and that even among us, with our cooler imaginations, the terms in question, such as "forever," &c., are used figuratively — are applied to limited periods, and this on the most common occasions and subjects. To take one instance for all, as being the strongest of all: there is no higher or more unqualified description of the endurance of future misery, than that which says, "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Now it has been very plausibly argued thus — that "if ever the time comes when their worm shall die; if ever there shall be a quenching of the fire at all; then it is not true, that their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." * And the argument might be as conclusive as it is plausible, were it not for a single passage in the Old Testament, which applies the same language to a punishment confessedly temporary. It is the closing passage of Isaiah; "and they shall go forth" — that is, from Jerusalem, and probably to the valley of Jehoshaphat, where it is well known, that carcases were thrown, and an almost perpetual fire

* Edwards.

kept to consume them — “ And they shall go forth, and shall look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me ; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring to all flesh.”

I shall only remark farther, upon the Scripture representations, that there is an ambiguity, a generality, a vastness, a terror about them, that seems fitted to check our confident reasonings. It is enough for us to fear. To speculate much, seems not our wisdom. Yet if we will speculate ; if we can dispute on such a subject ; if we can wrangle about texts and interpretations, and claim the full amount and force of every passage and statement, it may be well for us to be reminded, that we shall only confound ourselves, in our haste, and destroy the positions we take, in our eagerness to defend them. For if any one shall insist on the full force of those declarations, that denounce everlasting misery ; his adversary may as fairly take his stand on the opposite texts, which declare that God *will have all men to be saved* ; that Jesus came to destroy death ; that death is swallowed up of life. Or if any one shall confine himself to the words eternal, unquenchable, &c., and will allow them no modification, I see not how he can fairly deny to his adversary the equal right of adhering to the representations of death, destruction, loss of the soul, or in other words, of annihilation, which are applied to the same subject.

Nay, the latter will seem to have the advantage in the argument, for annihilation is an *everlasting* calamity. But not to dwell on this, the ambiguity mentioned furnishes an answer to an important objection to our views. It is said, if future misery is not literally eternal, what reason is there to think that future happiness is so? — for the same terms are brought to describe both. I answer that neither of them depend on general terms — that we are to look for our belief on all subjects to the scope and tenor of the sacred writings; and that, in particular, the promises of future happiness are all consistent, and leave no obscurity nor doubts. It is life, peace, rest; knowledge, perfection; glory, blessedness. But the threatenings of future evil are ambiguous, dark, obscure, and if taken literally, inconsistent. It is life, and death; being tormented, and being destroyed. It leaves therefore a vague but fearful impression. And such, it seems to me, were the Scriptures intended to leave, the impression of some vast and tremendous calamity, without precisely informing us what it is.

I cannot close this topic without offering one or two observations, independent of the scripture arguments, which seem to me of great weight.

There is one tremendous bearing of the doctrine of literally eternal punishment, the bare statement of which seems to me almost enough to decide the question. Take the instance of a child —

who has just begun to be a moral agent ; let the age be what it may — we need not now decide : — suppose that it has just come to the capacity of being sinful or holy ; that it has possessed this capacity one hour or one day ; that during this brief period, it has been selfish, passionate, unholy — a case not uncommon, I fear : — that in short it has possessed, during this brief period of its probation, a character, which the gospel does not approve, which it condemns, which it threatens : — and can you believe that this child, in ignorance, in imbecility, in temptation ; with passions unconsciously nurtured in the sleep of infancy, which are now breaking forth ; with scarcely any force of reason to restrain them ; with but a slight knowledge of God, with not a thought of futurity — that this child, the creature of weakness and ignorance, is actually, and in one single day, setting the seal to a misery that is eternal, and eternally increasing — to a misery which must therefore, in the event, infinitely surpass all that the world, in all the periods of its duration, has suffered or will suffer ? Yet this is the doctrine — this is one essential form of the doctrine of literally eternal punishment ; and if you cannot believe this, as I am persuaded if you feel the case you cannot, you cannot believe the doctrine at all, in any form.

There is another observation which seems to me equally conclusive. The doctrine, as it ap-

pears to me, destroys the natural proofs of the goodness of God. Let it be observed, that every question about this subject may be resolved into this: Is human life a blessing? If not, to what purpose is all that can be said about the order, beauty, richness, and kindly adaptations of this earthly system? What is it to me, that the heavens are glorious to behold, that the earth is fair to look upon — what to me, that I dwell in a splendid mansion — if on the whole I have more reason to be sorrowful than to be happy; if I have more to fear than to hope; if life is more to be lamented than desired; if it is a subject more of regret than gratitude? Is human life, then, a blessing? To deny it, is impiety. To deny it, is to take away all grounds of religious trust and devotion — all grounds of believing in the Sacred Scriptures, and in Jesus. For if God is not good, we can have no confidence in his rectitude or veracity. If God is not good, we cannot know but he may deceive us, with even miraculous proofs of falsehood. Our life, then, is a blessing: — that is, it is a thing to be desired. Now the question is, whether, when it is so difficult to form the character, which is required for future happiness; when it is so possible to fail; when the unerring Scriptures are so full of awful warnings; whether any rational being would desire existence, on the terrible condition, that if he did once fail, he would fail forever — that if he did fail in this short life, he must sink to a help-

less, remediless, everlasting woe. The word eternity passes easily from our lips, but consider what it imports — consider it deeply, and then say — who would think it a favor to take so tremendous a risk? Could any one of us have been brought into being, for one moment, in the maturity of his faculties, to decide on such a proposal, to decide whether he should take such a hazard, surely, he would make the refusal, with a strength of emotion, with a horror of feeling, that would be enough to destroy as it passed over him. “No! No!” he would exclaim, “save me from that trial: let me be the nothing that I was: there at least is safety: — save me from the paths of life, that conduct such multitudes — and why not me? — down to everlasting and everliving death!” Now, let us ask, can it be that the all-powerful and infinitely benevolent God has brought beings into existence in circumstances that deserve to be thus regarded? — that he has given them life so fated, so perilous, that if they could comprehend it — if it were not for their ignorance — they would abhor the gift as an infinite curse?

There are various degrees and shades of religious belief, and much that is called such is so low upon the scale, as scarcely to differ from downright skepticism. And I have often been ready to ask, when I have surveyed the aspects of life around me, whether men do *really believe* on this subject, what is written in their creed. There are

those, I know, who have found a great difference between *asserting* and *believing* in this case — who, when they came to be impressed with this doctrine, felt as if all the cheerfulness of life was the most horrible insensibility ; and as if all the light that was around them, the light that rested on the fair scenes of nature, was turned into darkness and gloom ; — felt as if all that is bright and gladdening, in the general aspects of society and of the world, was the most treacherous and terrible illusion ! And is it not so, if the popular doctrine be true ? I see a busy, toiling, and oftentimes joyous multitude, thronging the villages and cities of the world — hundreds of millions of human beings, to whom happiness is more than life, and misery more than death — I see childhood, dear and lovely childhood, with its opening moral faculties, in ten thousand bosoms, throbbing with new and glad existence — I see the whole world, dwelling in an ignorance, or a moral unconsciousness, almost like that of childhood — and *are* they, all around me, every hour, by hundreds and by thousands, dropping into a region of woes and agonies and groans, never to be relieved or terminated ? Gracious heaven ! — if one tenth part of the human race were the next year to die amidst the horrors of famine, that evil, light as it is in the comparison, would cover the earth with a universal mourning !

How evident is it, then, that men have nothing

approaching to a belief, of what the popular creed avers on this awful subject. I do not bring this as an *argument* against the doctrine it lays down. But I do maintain, that men should *believe* what they say, before they condemn those who cannot say so much ; that they should feel the trial of faith, before they decide on the propriety of a doubt.

I may be told that what I have been saying is not Scripture, but reasoning. I know it is reasoning. I have already shown, as I think, that the Scriptures do not warrant the doctrine that is commonly deduced from them ; and to my mind, the reasoning I have used strongly enforces the rejection of it.

III. But I hasten to my final remark, which is, that the Scriptures reveal our future danger, whatever it be, for the purpose of alarming us ; and therefore, that to speculate on this subject, in order to lessen our fear of sinning, involves the greatest hazard and impiety. There is a high moral use — and it is the only use for which the awful revelation of “the powers of the world to come” was intended, and most evidently and eminently fitted — and that is, to awaken fear. Whatever else the language in question means, it means this. About other topics relating to it, there may be questions ; about this, none at all. And after all that has been said, I shall not hesitate to add, that we are in no danger of really believing too

much, or fearing too much. And this is my answer, if any should object to the moral tendency of the views that have been offered — I maintain that a man *should fear all that he can*, and I do actually hold a belief, that affords the fullest scope for such a feeling. It is not of so much consequence that any one should use fearful words on this subject, and even violently contend for them, as that he should himself fear and tremble.

And I repeat, that there is reason. For if we adopt any opinion, short of the most blank and bald Universalism, it cannot fail to be serious. Will you embrace the idea of a literal destruction? Imagine, then, if possible, what it is to be no more forever! Look down into the abyss of dark and dismal annihilation. Think with yourself, what it would be, if all which you call yourself, your mind, your life, your cherished being, were to fall into the jaws of everlasting death! Oh! there is something dreadful beyond utterance in the thought of annihilation — to go away from the abodes of life, to quit our hold of life and being itself; to be nothing — nothing — forever! while the glad universe should go onward in its brightness and its glory, and myriads of beings should live and be happy; and all their dwellings, and all their worlds should be overspread with life and beauty and joy! Imagine it, if you can. Think, that the hour of last farewell to all this had come: think of the last moment, of the last act, of the last thought — and

that thought annihilation ! Oh ! it would be enough to start with its energy your whole being into a new life ; — methinks, you would spring with agony from the verge of the horrible abyss, and cry for life — for existence — though it were woe and torment ! Shall we then prefer the hope of long and remedial suffering ? — Then carry forward your thoughts to that dark world, where there shall be “no more sacrifice for sin” — no more Saviour to call and win us — no more mild and gentle methods of restoration : — where sin must be purged from us, if at all, “so as by fire.” Carry forward your thoughts to that dark struggle with the powers of retribution, where every malignant and hateful passion will wage the fearful war against the soul ; where habit, too, will have bound and shackled the soul with its everlasting chains of darkness ; and its companions, fiends like itself, shall only urge it on to sin. When will the struggle cease ? If sin cannot be resisted now, in this world of means, and motives, and mercies, how shall it be resisted *then* ? When or how shall the miserable soul retrieve its steps ? From what depth of eternity shall it trace back its way of ages ? God only knows. To us it is not given. But we know that the retribution of a sinful soul is what we ought above all things to fear. For thus are we instructed. “Fear not them that, after they have killed the body, have no more that they can do : but fear him who is able to destroy

both soul and body in hell ; yea, I say unto you, fear him." We know not what it is ; but we know that such terms and phrases as we read, — "the wrath to come ; the worm that dieth not ; the fire that is not quenched ; the blackness of darkness ; the fiery indignation : " — that these words not only import what is fearful, but were *intended* to inspire a salutary dread. We know not what it is ; but we have heard of one who lifted up his eyes being in torment, and saw the regions of the blessed afar off, and cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me ! for I am tormented in this flame." We know not what it is ; but we know that the finger of inspiration has pointed awfully to that world of calamity. We know that inspired prophets and apostles, when the interposing veil has been, for a moment, drawn before them, have shuddered with horror at the spectacle. We know that the Almighty himself has gathered and accumulated all the images of earthly distress and ruin, not to show us what it is, but to warn us of what it may be — that he has spread over this world the deep shadows of his displeasure, leaving nothing to be seen, and everything to be dreaded ! And thus has he taught us, what I would lay down, as the moral of these observations, and of all my reflections on this subject, that *it is not our wisdom to speculate, but to fear !*

CURSORY OBSERVATIONS.

NO. VI. CONCLUSION. THE MODES OF ATTACK UPON LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY, THE SAME THAT WERE USED AGAINST THE DOCTRINE OF THE APOSTLES, AND REFORMERS.

IN being assailed as it is, Liberal Christianity meets but with the fate that naturally attends, and actually has attended all improvement. Whether Unitarianism be a real progress of truth or not, this general statement will not be questioned. Every great advancement in science, in the arts, in politics, has had to encounter this hostility. No cause has been, or is, more bitterly opposed, than the cause of political liberty. So it has been with religion. Christianity had to struggle long with the hostility of the world. Its doctrines were opposed, and its friends reproached. And when it declined from its purity, when it was corrupted through its popularity, through its prevalence, through its very orthodoxy, I may say — when a revival of its true doctrines was needed, the men who stood forward in that work, the *Reformers*,

found that innovation was still an offence, that dissent was heresy, that truth was accounted no better than ruinous and fatal error.

I say these things, in the general, and at the outset, not to prove, nor would I anywhere pretend to prove by such an argument, that Unitarianism is right, but to show that opposition to it is no evidence of its being wrong; to show that a doctrine may be, like primitive Christianity, "everywhere spoken against," and yet be a true doctrine. For there are many, who feel from the bare circumstance, that a system is so much reproached, as if it must be wrong or questionable; and there are many more, who suffer their opinions to float on the current of popular displeasure, without inquiring at all into their justice or validity. Let such remember that no new truths ever did, nor, till men are much changed, ever can enter into the world, without this odium and hostility; and let them not account that, which may be the very seal of truth, to be the brand of error!

I will now proceed to notice some of the particular modes of attack to which Liberal Christianity is subject, to meet these assaults and objections, and to show that Unitarianism in being subjected to these assaults suffers no new or singular fate.

I. In the first place, then, it is common to charge upon new opinions all the accidents attending their progress; to blend with the main cause all the

circumstances that happen to be connected with it. This is perhaps not unnatural, though it be unjust. Men hear that a new system is introduced, that a new sect is rising. They know nothing thoroughly about it, but they are inquiring what it is. In this state of mind they meet, not with a Unitarian book, but more likely with a passage from a book, taken from its connexion, culled out, it is probable, on purpose to make a bad impression, and forthwith this passage is made to stand for the system. Whenever Unitarianism is mentioned, the obnoxious paragraph rises to mind, and settles all questions about it, at once. Or, perhaps, some act or behavior of some individual in this new class of religionists is mentioned, — and this is henceforth considered and quoted as a just representation, not only of the whole body, but of their principles also. Thus an impediment in Paul's speech was made an objection to Christianity — an objection which he thought it necessary gravely to debate with the church in Corinth.

I have introduced this sort of objection first, not only because it arises naturally out of a man's first acquaintance with Unitarianism, but because it gives me an opportunity to say, before I proceed any further, *how* much of what passes under this name, it is necessary, as I conceive, to defend. I say, then, it is not necessary to defend everything that passes under this name — everything that every or any Unitarian has written, or said, or

done. So obvious a disclamation might seem to be scarcely needful; but it will not seem so to any, who have observed the manner in which things of this sort are charged upon us. What is it to me that such and such persons have said, or written, this or that thing? What is it to the main cause of truth, which we profess to support, or to the great questions at issue? In the circumstances of the Unitarian body, in the novelty (to a certain extent) of their opinions, in the violent opposition they meet with, I see exposures to many faults; to excesses and extravagances, to mistakes and errors. I could strike off half of the opinions and suggestions, that have sprung up from this progress of inquiry, and still retain a body of unspeakably precious truth. There are several things, and some things of considerable practical moment, which I seriously doubt, whether Unitarians, as a denomination, have yet come to view rightly. The violence of opposition has, undoubtedly, in some respects, carried them to an extreme, in some points of opinion and practice. And certainly I find things in their writings, which, in my judgment, are indefensible. What less *can* be said, if we retain any independence, or sobriety, or discrimination about us? What less can be said of any fallible body of men? — of any body, comprising, as all denominations do, all sorts of men, all sorts of writers and thinkers? If they are not inspired, they must be sometimes wrong.

Nay, to bring this nearer home, it were folly for any one of us to contend that everything *he* has said or written is right, or even that it is done with a *right spirit*. Here is a conflict of opinions, the eagerness of dispute, the perverting influence of controversy. Here is an effervescence of the general mind. The moral elements of the world are shaken together, if not more violently, yet more intimately perhaps, than they ever were before. If any man can, with a severe calmness and a solemn scrutiny, sit down and meditate upon those things which agitate so many minds; if he can separate the true from the false, and say a few things, out of many, that are exactly right, and a few things more that are helping on to a right issue, it is, perhaps, all that he ought to expect. How much dross there may be, in the pure gold of the best minds, "He that sitteth as a Refiner" only can know.

This, I confess, is my view of our controversies, and of all human controversies. I have no respect in this matter for authorities, for infallible sentences, or for the reverence and weight that are given to sentences, because they are uttered by some leader in the church, or because they are written in a book. I have no respect for the *spirit of quotation*, — that, having brought forward a grave proposition from some synod, or council, or book, or body of divinity, holds *that* to be enough. All men err — all synods, and councils, and consis-

tories, and books, and bodies of divinity ; which is only saying, that they all do that in the aggregate and in form, which they do individually and necessarily. And if this be true, if these views be just, how unreasonable is it, to catch up sentences here and there, from any class of writings, and erect them into serious and comprehensive charges ?

The real and proper question is about principles. Let these be shown to be wrong, and the denomination that abides by them must fall. On this, the only tenable ground for any reasonable man, I take my stand. I have no doubt that the leading principles of Unitarianism are true ; and it would not, in the slightest degree, disturb this faith, if there could be shown me ten volumes of indefensible extracts from Unitarian writings. Whether half a volume of such, out of the hundred that have been written, can be produced, I leave not to the candor of our opponents to decide, but to their ingenuity to make out, if they are able. The constant repetition of three or four stale extracts, garbled from the writings of Priestley and Belsham, would seem to show that the stock of invidious quotations is very small. In fact, I do consider Unitarians, in comparison with any other religious body, as having written with great general propriety, soberness, and wisdom. But if they have not, or if any one thinks they have not, it will very little affect the general truth of their principles.

And how ill, let me ask, could any other body of Christians bear this sort of scrutiny? How easy would it be to select from Orthodox writings, and even from those of great general reputation, a mass of extracts that would make the whole world cry out!—one part with horror at their enormity, and another with indignation at their being presented for the purpose of showing what orthodoxy is! It would be unjust, I confess. It would disturb no independent believer in that system: and as little ought such things to disturb us.

I have now noticed the first feeling of objection which naturally arises against a new system—that which proceeds from confounding the main cause with the circumstances that attend it.

II. But another objection, and that perhaps which is first put in form, is against the alleged newness of the system. It is said that this religion is a new thing, that it is a departure from the faith of ages, that it unsettles the most established notions of things, and breaks in upon the order and peace of the churches. I state this objection strongly for the sake of our opponents, and indeed much more strongly than it deserves to be. For Unitarianism professes, so far from being a new thing, to be the old, pure, primitive Christianity. It does not profess, even in comparison with orthodoxy, to be essentially a new thing, but only so, in certain speculative doctrines; and still less is it the friend or promoter of disorder and dis-

union. Nevertheless, it is, to a certain extent, a new thing, and it occasions, through the opposition made to it, much disturbance.

And can these, I ask, be valid or weighty objections in the mouths of Christians and Protestants? Christianity was once a new thing. The Athenian philosophers, said to Paul, no doubt with as much contempt as any modern questioner could feel, "we would know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is." And others said, "these men that have turned the world upside down have come hither also." Yes, troublesome, "pestilent fellows," "movers of sedition," devisers of mischief, and "doers of evil," were the first propagators of Christianity accounted, and were not ashamed thus to suffer in imitation of their slandered Master. And the *Reformers* of Christianity, in the 16th century, trod in the same steps, and in like manner had their "names cast out as evil." And especially was it objected to them, that they departed from the faith of ages, and invaded the repose of time-hallowed doctrines and institutions. And in the strong confidence, ay, *the strong argument of the majority*, the same things were said about the truth as are now said, — the same cry of "the church is in danger" was raised, the same anathemas were pronounced against dangerous heresies and the denying of the faith. The whole scene was acted over, that is now witnessed, of an exclusive and hostile

orthodoxy, on the one hand, and a firm and unyielding dissent on the other — only that orthodoxy could then command the inquisition and the rack ; and now it only sets its tribunal on the reputation of men, and subjects the mind to trials, that in some instances scarcely fall short of the tortures of the rack. This has always been the fate of innovation, and, perhaps, it always must be. And to those who, for conscience' sake, draw upon themselves this hostility to whatever is new, I would say ; think it not strange concerning this fiery trial, as though any strange thing happened to you. It is the same that has happened to the reformers of faith, to the witnesses for truth, in all ages. Be not astonished or disheartened at this. Only bear it patiently. No assault, no detraction can injure you, if you bear them with the spirit of Christ. Rather will they benefit you unspeakably and for ever — benefit you in awakening that love, and meekness, and humility, the trying of which is more precious than that of gold which perisheth. “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ,” if ye be reproached for laboring to rescue his name and his religion from mistake and injury, “happy are ye ; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth on you !”

III. Another method of attack upon Liberal Christianity is to awaken sentiments of pity and horror against it. I am not about to deny that this is very honestly done ; but I do say that it is

an unworthy mode of assault ; that it appeals not to the judgment, but to the passions ; and that it is very apt to be the strongest, in the weakest hands. To put on a solemn countenance, to speak in sepulchral tones of awe and lamentation, to *warn* men against this doctrine, is easy. But, alas ! for the weakness of men, if it is an instrument easily wielded, it is also an instrument of terrible power with the superstitious, the timid, and unreflecting. A considerate man, a man who respects the minds and consciences of those he has to deal with, will be cautious how he takes hold of such a weapon as this — a weapon which prevails chiefly with human weakness, which strikes the very part of our nature that most needs to be supported, which wounds only the infirm, and overwhelms only the prostrate. For I need not say, that it is precisely with minds in this situation that tones of pity and horror have the greatest influence. A man of independent thought and vigorous understanding, who could better afford to bear this sort of influence, is the very person who will not yield to it. He will say indignantly, “ that is nothing to the purpose. That does not satisfy me. I did not ask you to warn me, but to enlighten me. I did not ask you to weep, but to reason. No doubt you feel as you say, and very sincerely feel thus ; it is not your sincerity that I question, but your argument. You degrade my understanding, when you attempt to work upon it

in this manner. I was made to think. The Lord of conscience has given me liberty to inquire ; and I will not be subject to any other influence. God has called me to liberty ; and man shall not lay me under bondage."

Nor is this all. Pity and horror prove nothing, indeed ; but it is moreover a matter of history, that truth — whether our doctrine be true or not — that TRUTH has always made its progress amidst the *pity* and *horror* of men. Yes ; it has come thus ; amidst sighings, and doubtings, and shakings of the head, and warnings of danger, and forebodings of evil. Yes ; it has held its way, through tokens like these ; with dark countenances about it, and loud denunciations, and woful anathemas. It has stood up and spoken in the person of its great Teacher ; and men have "gnashed their teeth and rent their garments," at its voice. It has gone forth into the world, with its devoted Apostles, and been accounted "the offscouring of all things." It has "prophesied in sackcloth," with its faithful witnesses, and borne the cross of ignominy and reproach. The angry Sanhedrim, the bloody Inquisition, the dungeon, the rack, the martyr's stake, have testified to the *abhorrence of men against the truth* !

I do not say that the truth I hold is worthy of this glorious fellowship. But I say that its being joined in any measure to this fellowship does not prove it false. And if it be true, as I solemnly

believe it is, then let not its advocates claim entire exemption from the trials of their elder brethren. It will go on, and men will speak evil of it, and they will struggle against it, and they will lament and weep ; — but it will be as if they lifted up their voice to withstand the rolling seasons, or struggled against the chariot wheels of the morning, or poured out vain tears upon the mighty stream that is to bear all before it. I say this, more in sorrow, I hope, than in scorn. I am sorry for those who cannot see this matter as I think they ought to see it. I am sorry for the unhappiness, for the honest grief, which a misplaced pity, and an uncharitable zeal, and a spirit of reproach and condemnation, give them. But their grief, save for its own sake, moves me not at all. I consider it as a penance for their mistaken hostility to truth, rather than a fair admonition of error. I believe, and can believe no less, that this unhappiness is simply the *fruit* of error. Uncharitableness *must* be unhappy ; anger *must* be painful ; exclusion, and anathematizing, and dooming sincere brethren to perdition, *must* be works of bitterness and grief. I wonder not, that a man should weep while he is doing them ; my only wonder is, that he can ever do them, and not weep !

IV. But I shall now proceed to consider one or two objections of a graver character. It is said, that the religion, which Unitarianism teaches, does

not meet the wants of human nature, that it does not satisfy the mind, that it fails as a support and comfort to the soul. I recur again to the observation, that it is perfectly natural that this objection should be brought against new views of religion, simply because they are new, and whether they are true or not ; and therefore, that no strange thing happens to them, when they are thus regarded. If you take away some parts of a religion on which men have relied, you take away some part of their reliance, and they cannot feel for a time, as if anything else would be such a support and satisfaction to them. This will be especially true, if you introduce simpler, and more rational ideas of religion. The Jew could say to the Christian, " how many feasts, and holy-days, and sabbaths, and new moons, and rites, and ordinances, on which my soul relied, have you removed from me ! " The Catholic could say of the Protestant, " where, alas ! are the masses, and the confessionals, and the comfortable absolutions, and the intercessions of saints, *for him !* " And things of the same import, concerning the more *doctrinal* aspects of religion, may the Calvinist say to the Unitarian. But the Christian and the Protestant could reply to their respective opponents, " We have a reliance as sure and satisfactory as yours ; and more sound and spiritual, as we judge. " And so may the Unitarian say to the Calvinist.

But let us go into the real merits of the case. What *is* a foundation and a support in religion, and whence does true comfort arise? Our Saviour speaks of a foundation, when he says, "he that heareth my words and *doeth them*, I will liken to a wise man" — whose "house fell not, because it was *founded* on a rock." Surely, Unitarians do not reject *this* foundation. "But our own endeavors and virtues are not sufficient of themselves." Certainly not; and Unitarians may rely, as unfeignedly as their brethren, on the mercy of God, and they sincerely profess to do so. This satisfies them. To say, that it does not satisfy the demands of a different theology, is only saying that the speculations of the two classes differ. "But," it may be contended, "it does not satisfy *the wants of human nature*." This is a matter of which every one must judge from the feelings of his own mind. As the Unitarian experiences human nature, he would say that the simple promise of God's mercy and aid to his humble endeavors does give all needful satisfaction. A certain theory of the divine government may not be satisfied — the superstitious wants of human nature may not be satisfied; but the Unitarian believes that its real wants are.

But I go farther; though I would say what I am about to say, with all reasonable and fair qualifications. I feel obliged to use increasing caution in all general representations. There are men

too intelligent and good in every class of Christians, to be very much affected by a formal creed. Nevertheless, I have not a doubt, that there are many to whom the popular religion furnishes grounds of support and satisfaction, which are not right and rational grounds. The regular plan and process of religious experience, the defined steps and dates — an exact time and moment of conversion, and the certainty of salvation after that, — the efficacy of the act of faith, distinguished as it often is from the general efficacy of a holy life, — “the view of Christ,” and of the atonement as relieving the sinner from his burden: “the rolling off of the burden of sin,” as it is often called, — the notions of a foundation, and a hope, and a joy, disconnected as they are from the result of long-tried virtue and piety — the idea of the Holy Spirit as alone doing the “effectual work” of salvation in man — doing it by a special interposition after all the sinner’s efforts are over, and he is brought to despair of himself — these views, as I believe, furnish a fallacious support, and comfort, and relief, to many. I *would* lay a weight upon man’s responsibility — which is, no doubt, disagreeable to him. I would tell a sinful man, that anxiety is more becoming to him than confidence and repose. He is indeed to confide and repose in the mercy of God and the interposition of Christ; but these no more avail him, than to tell him that there is wealth in store for his industry.

It is, so far as his own part is concerned — it is industry, it is working, continual working, daily accumulation, that is to make him rich towards God. I would tell him that *believing* is virtually the same as doing; and that it is this doing, this constant doing, and this alone, that can roll away the burden of sin. In short, I would say that for a sinful man to attain to the favor of God and to heaven, is the same as for an intemperate man to attain to sobriety and virtue — that it is what he must do, every day and hour, day by day and hour by hour, striving, watching, guarding, praying, keeping himself under perpetual restraint, till he is redeemed from his iniquity. In other words, I would strive to represent this matter rationally; and would say, that the sinner is to become a holy man, just as the ignorant is to become a learned man, by little and little, by constant accumulations, by gaining one truth to-day, and another to-morrow, by perpetual progress.

Now I do not deny that these things, in the general, are taught by Calvinists, but then I maintain that they are commonly taught in such a way, that they are so mixed up with certain doctrines, as that their pressure upon the soul is relieved: so that a man does not feel that he is to become a Christian just as he is to become a rich man, or a skilful, or a wise man. He does not feel this pressure of necessity upon him, every morning, and lie down with this anxiety every night, as the

seeker of learning or wealth does. Alas ! few feel this as they ought to do ! But this is what we should strive to make men feel. And we ought to sweep away all doctrines that stand in the way of this. We should allow of no peace ; we should hear of no summary method, no parcelling out of the matters of religious experience, that will make it a different thing from the daily, plain, practical, unwearied *doing* of every thing a man ought to do. No believing of creeds, no paying of contributions, no regular and stated prayers, no oft-repeated confessions, proper as these are in their place — no atonement, nor election, nor special grace, nor perseverance, true as they are when truly explained — should save a man from the pressure of this instant necessity.

I conceive that the reason why Calvinism offers more support to many minds is, that it is a more artificial system, and approaches less nearly to the simple truth. It is too much a religion of seasons and times, of fixtures and props, of reliefs and substitutions, of comforts and confidences. And I am persuaded that the Roman Catholic religion would much better answer the purpose of supporting and satisfying minds, in the state now supposed. There have been, not long since, some distinguished converts in Germany to the Catholic faith. I could easily conceive of one of them as saying, — “ here at last I find rest ; I find certainty and refuge in the infallibility and absolution of

the Holy Church. This, too, is the accumulated support of ages, built on the virtues and sufferings of fathers, and confessors, and martyrs. How, also, am I affected with the real presence of the body of Christ in the sacrament, with the guardianship of saints, and the interceding tenderness of the Holy Mother! I never was so impressed with any religion as this. I never found such joy and peace in any. This is the religion for a *sinner*! This is what my depraved and burdened nature wanted!"

"Yes," replies the sound Protestant, "but it would not move *me*, nor support, nor comfort me. The impressiveness of a religion does not depend, altogether, upon its truth or falsehood, but very much on the state of the mind that receives it." And this is what we answer to the Calvinist. We say that Calvinism would make no kindly nor renewing impression on *us*. And as to comfort and support, it seems to us in some of its features, the most cheerless and desolate of all systems.

V. But I must hasten to the last objection that I intended to notice. It is said that there is a fatal coldness and deadness in the Unitarian system, that there is no excitement in it, no reality, no seriousness, no strictness; that it is fitted to gratify the proud, the philosophic, the worldly, and the vicious.

I must again remind the reader, in the first place, that this is just what new views of religion

may expect, and what they have always in fact encountered. It is no strange thing, that strangers to the practical sense of our principles should not confess their power. All this cry was raised against the Reformation, as loudly as it is raised against us.

Nay, it may be admitted in the second place, without any prejudice to the cause I maintain, that new views in religion will be most likely to attract the attention of those, who are least prejudiced in favor of the old : that is to say, of the less religious ; and of persons, too, who have been less religious, in many instances, for the very reason, that they could not bear the errors of the popular faith. Nay more ; it may be admitted that new views of religion, however true, will probably do *injury* to some. There are some most extraordinary confessions to this effect, from the lips of the Reformers. New views are liable to unsettle the minds that hastily receive them ; and some, that are averse to all religion and to all self-denial, may vaguely hope, that another doctrine would be more indulgent to their vices. Yes, and they may make it so ; for what good thing has not been abused ? This great subject, in fact, has been so treated and taught, that in religion, most of all, men are apt to show themselves superficial and weak creatures. And it is not strange that those, who have dwelt long in darkness, should be dazzled and bewildered and

led astray by the light, or that liberty should be a dangerous thing to the enslaved. What if Christianity had been judged by the state of the Corinthian Church?

And yet Christianity came as a religion of power and strictness, and so I maintain that it still is found to be in the form, in which we hold it. If others, who are experimentally ignorant of it, may testify against it; we, who have felt what it is, may be excused if we testify in its favor. And I know that I speak the language of hundreds and thousands, when I say that religion to us is the one theme of interest — of unspeakable, undying interest. We would not exchange the sense we have of it, for thrones and kingdoms. To take it away, would be to take from us our chief light, blessing, and hope. We have felt the power of the world to come, and no language can tell what that power is, — can tell the value of an immortal hope and prospect. We have heard the great and good teacher, and we feel that “never man spake like this man.” By him, we trust that we have been brought nigh to God; and this nearness consummates the infinite good, which we embrace in our religion. — On all this I might dwell long and abundantly; but I will not trust myself to say, what I feel that I might say for many, lest I be accused of “the foolishness of boasting.” And if even for what I *do* say, I *am* so accused, I must adopt the apostle’s justification, and say, I have

been "compelled." For how can men, who feel that religion is the great resort of the mind, and the living interest, and the animating hope, consent to the charge, that all on this subject is cold and cheerless as death among them ! We should be ungrateful for the first of blessings, if we could be silent. We have communed with religion in sorrow, and it has comforted us ; in joy, and it has blessed us ; in difficulty and trouble, and it has guided and calmed us ; in temptations, and it has strengthened us ; in conscious guilt and error, and this religion has encouraged and comforted and forgiven us ; and we must testify our sense of its value. It is here that we have treasured up the joy and hope of our being ; it is here that we have poured out the fulness of our hearts ; and if this is to be cold and dead, we ask in the name of sense and truth, what is it to feel ? If this is philosophy, God give us more of this philosophy. Yes, it is philosophy, divine and heaven-descended ; it is truth immortal ; it is religion, which if it can be carried on within us, will, we are persuaded, through God's mercy, lead us to heaven,

I have now completed the views, which in conclusion, I intended to give of some of the popular objections to Unitarian Christianity. Let me warn every man, in close, to beware of taking any light and trifling views of the religion, on which he founds his hope. If any views that ever enter

our minds tend to slacken the obligation of virtue, or to let down the claims of piety, let us discard those views at once and for ever. Let us take a viper to our bosom sooner than lay a flattering unction to the soul, that will make it easier in sin. Sin is the sting of death, and it will kill and destroy all that is dear and precious to an immortal creature. Religion only is life and peace; and it is also zeal, and fervor, and joy, and hope, and watchfulness, and strictness, and self-denial, and patience unto the end.

THE ANALOGY OF RELIGION WITH OTHER
SUBJECTS CONSIDERED.

DISCOURSE I.

I. COR. X. 15. — I SPEAK AS TO WISE MEN: JUDGE YE
WHAT I SAY.

IT was an observation of an eminent expounder of the science of jurisprudence,* that “the reason of the law is the life of the law ; for though a man,” says he, “ can tell the law, yet if he know not the reason thereof, he shall soon forget his superficial knowledge. But when he findeth the right reason of the law, and so bringeth it to his natural reason that he comprehendeth it as his own, this will not only serve him for the understanding of that particular case, but of many others.”

This comprehensive reason is as necessary in religion, as in the law ; which, rightly considered, indeed, is but a part of the science of religion or rectitude. The great danger to the mind, indeed, in pursuing every science, is that of being narrow and technical, and so of losing truth, while it is

* Lord Littleton.

gaining knowledge. For, truth is universal; it is the conclusion derived from those facts, the possession of which we call knowledge. Truth, I say, is universal; and religious truth possesses this character as much as any other. What is true in religion, is true in everything else to which such truth is capable of being applied; true in the law, true in moral philosophy, true in the prudence of life, true in all human action.

From this position results the use of an instrument for religious investigation, to which I wish to invite your attention. The instrument I refer to is comparison. I invite you to compare religion with other things, to which it is analogous. Fairly to put this instrument into your hands, to give some examples of its use and application, will require a course of three or four lectures, which I shall give on Sunday evenings.

Let it not be supposed that there is anything new in this mode of investigation. On the contrary, it is so familiar, that it enters more or less into almost every religious discourse. It is justified by the practice of all sorts of religious and moral teachers. It is the only instrument used in that great work of Bishop Butler, entitled his *Analogy*. All I wish to do is, for a little time, to fix attention upon it.

It is not pretended that this instrument is infallible. The degree of proof, to be gathered from any comparison, depends on the closeness of

the analogy. To this point, the closeness of the analogy, the main point in this kind of inquiry, I shall give the most discriminating attention that I am capable of, and shall wish my hearers constantly to judge, as wise men, what I say. The instrument, I confess, is liable to abuse. To give an instance of this: I have heard preachers liken the case of the unconverted sinner to that of a man in a burning house, or in a pestilence, or in peril of shipwreck, and they have advocated and defended the utmost extravagance of spiritual fear and effort, on the ground that the sinner is in still greater danger. Here is comparison, indeed, but no analogy. There is no analogy, that is to say, in the precise point on which the argument depends. There is analogy, indeed, in the danger, but not in the nature of the danger. In a burning house, or in a shipwreck, the peril is instant; all that can be done for escape, must be done in an hour or a moment; and men are justified in acting almost like distracted men at such a moment. But spiritual danger is of a different character; it is not all accumulated upon a given instant; it is not one stupendous crisis in a man's life, but it spreads itself over his whole being. It is not, like the whelming wave, or the already scorching fire, to bring fright and agony into the mind; on the contrary, the special characteristics of spiritual fear should be reflection, calmness, and intense thoughtfulness. That is to say, it is to be the ac-

tion of the spiritual, and not of the animal nature. You perceive, therefore, that the instrument, I am about to recommend to you, is to be used with great caution, with a wise discretion. In the use of it, I shall constantly hold myself amenable to that judgment of good sense, to which the apostle himself, in my text, appealed. Bishop Butler, in the great work before alluded to, limited the uses of analogy entirely to the purpose of defence. He maintained and showed, that certain facts in nature and in life were analogous to certain doctrines in the Bible; and his argument was, not that the existence of the facts *proved* the truth of the doctrines, but simply that they took away all fair and philosophical objection from those doctrines. Thus, if the consequences of a single sin often follow a man through life, if this is actually a part of God's administration of the affairs of this world, then there is no objection to that doctrine of our Scriptures, which declares that consequences of a life of sin shall follow the offender into another state. With Bishop Butler's views of what the doctrines of revelation *are*, I have nothing here to do. I have only to say, that I am willing to be governed by a similar caution. I wish to present to you certain rational views of religion, as they appear to me, and these mainly of practical religion; and against the common allegations of insufficiency, shallowness, or untruth, in these views, I wish to ap-

peal to what men allow to the sound and satisfactory and thorough, in other departments of human action and feeling.

There is, however, one objection to this method of inquiry itself, which I must consider before I enter upon it. It is said that religion is God's work in the soul, a peculiar, if not a supernatural work ; and hence it is inferred that religion is not to be judged of, on principles common to it with other subjects and qualities. I answer, that the conclusion does not follow from the premises. I might deny the premises perhaps, in the sense in which they are put ; but for the purposes of the proposed inquiry, I need not deny them. I may allow that religion is the special work of God in the soul, which it *is* in a certain sense, and yet I may fairly maintain that it is to be judged of like other principles in the soul. For all Christians, of a sound and reasonable mind, are now accustomed to admit, that God's work in the soul does not violate the laws of the soul ; that the influence of the Infinite Spirit, whatever it be, is perfectly compatible with the moral constitution of the being influenced. But *how* is man influenced in other things ? The answer is, by considerations, by reasons and motives, by fears and hopes. So is he influenced in religion. All moral influence, whether derived from Scripture, from preaching, from reflection, or from conscience, is one great and perfectly rational appeal to man's moral na-

ture; and the result is to be judged of accordingly. What religion is true, — and what is true in the views presented of the received religion; what are proper and just exhibitions of it; what are the due and right means and methods of cultivating it; and what are its claims upon us, — all these matters are to be considered, as we consider other obligations, truths, developments of character, and methods of improvement. It is no argument for unreasonableness, for impropriety of conduct or manners, for extravagance, fanaticism, or folly, that the subject is religion, or that religion is the work of God in the soul. This, on the contrary, is the strongest of reasons for insisting that religion should be perfectly and profoundly sober, rational, and wise. That which comes from the fountain of reason, and as its gift to a rational nature, will not, we may be sure, contradict the laws of that reason and that nature.

This is a point to be insisted on, and the proposed discussion may have special advantages in this view. Indeed, I know of no other way in which the worst practical errors are to be removed from the Church, but by the application of the test in question; by carrying religion entirely out from the walls of conventicles, and the pale of technical theology, and from all the narrow maxims of peculiar religious coteries and sects, into the broad field of common sense and sound judgment. The advocates, whether of a speculative

system or of a practical economy in religion, can never tell how it looks, till they see it in this open light, and in its relation to the whole surrounding world of objects. Kept within a certain circle and never looking beyond it, and holding that things may be true in that circle, which are true nowhere else, men may reason in that circle, and reason strongly, and reason for ever, and never advance one step towards broad, generous, universal truth. Thus it has always been, that mistake, fanaticism, practical error in religious matters, have rested their claims on the peculiar, unusual, supernatural character of the subject. Religious extravagance of every sort has always had its strong hold, within barriers that have shut out the common judgment and sense of the world. Nay, I may add, since I have spoken of comparing religion with other qualities of the mind, that there are many by whom it is yet to be learnt, that religion *is* a quality of the mind. They are apt to consider it as a gift, and an influence, rather than as a quality, principle, and part of the soul. They consider it as something superinduced, bestowed upon human nature, rather than as the great and just result of that nature. They do not feel as if it were something dear to that nature,—something not forced upon its reluctant acceptance, not sustained in its rebellious bosom,—but cherished within it, craved by it, welcome and precious to all its strongest affections and noblest faculties.

So the *many*, I say, are not accustomed to regard it. They do not see it as the great development of the soul ; but they see it as a communication. And seeing it as a communication,—as coming, in some supernatural manner, from God, they are apt to set it apart from other qualities and pursuits. They do not deal freely with it. If they do not feel as if it were something *above* reason, they, at least, feel as if it were something with which reason may not strongly and fearlessly grapple,—as if it were too *etherial* an essence for the plain dealing of common sense. To this plain dealing, however, it must be brought. To this we are justified in bringing it, by the clearest principles of all rational theology ; for all such theology admits, that God does no violence to the laws of human nature, when he works within it both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. And I say and repeat, that to this test of sober and judicious comparison, religion must come, if it is ever to be disabused of the errors that have burthened and enslaved it. How, otherwise, could you proceed, if you had to deal, for instance, with the absurdities of Hindoo superstition ? You might try to approach it in other ways ; as, for instance, with solemn tones and solemn asseverations ; but you would find, at length, that you could do nothing else with it, but to bring it into comparison with other principles and manifestations of human nature and human life. You

would say, "this penance of yours, this hanging yourself from a tree, in a burning sun, to die, is absurd, useless, uncalled for by the Deity. Who ever thought of seeking happiness or securing the friendship of any other being, in this way?" And if he were to answer that religion is unlike every other principle in its exactions, and that God is not to be pleased as other beings are, you would undertake to show him, that the principle of goodness is everywhere the same; that God, whose nature is goodness, cannot be pleased with pain for its own sake; that he desires no sacrifice which can effect no good end. That is to say, you would endeavor to reason with the superstitious devotee, upon general principles; upon principles applicable alike to religion and to every other analogous subject.

This is what I shall now attempt to do with religion in general, by proceeding to some particular instances. The instances, which I shall take up in the remainder of this discourse, belong to the department of first principles; and in them I shall chiefly address the religious skeptic.

I. In the first place, let us look at the very elements of religion. By some it is denied, that there are any such elements. They say that religion is altogether a matter of institution and appointment. They say that it has been imposed upon mankind by priests and by governments; and but for these external influences, they say,

that there never would have been such a thing as religion in the world. Let us look at these assumptions in the light of a comprehensive philosophy.

Now, it is to be observed, that the basis of every other science and subject in the world is laid in certain indisputable first principles. In other words, there are certain undeniable facts, either in nature or in the mind, on which, as a foundation, every system of truth is built up. Thus in the natural sciences, in mineralogy, in chemistry, and botany and astronomy, there are certain facts in nature, which are received as the basis. These facts are generalized into laws, and these laws are formed into systems. Newton saw the apple fall, and from this fact he proceeded, till he had established the laws of planetary motion, and the sublime system of the universe. So in the abstract science of geometry, certain unquestionable truths or axioms are laid down; and so in the science of the mind, certain irresistible emotions and acts of the mind are taken, as the ground of each of these departments of philosophy. Even the department of taste has its undeniable first truths. Now, the science or subject of religion has, in the same way, its indisputable first truths. In the mind, there are certain religious facts, as clearly manifested as any metaphysical facts, or any emotions of taste. But how do we come to the knowledge of these latter

classes of facts? I answer, by experience, and by nothing else. And how do we come to the knowledge of the religious facts in the mind? I answer, by the same means, and no other.

What then is the conclusion? Why, that religion has a foundation in our nature as truly as mental philosophy. A man may deny this; he may resort to his presumptuous assertions, and say, that religion is nothing but an imposition, a dogma, and a fancy. But he might just as well assert that reason is nothing but an imposition, and a dogma, and a fancy. He may point to the diversities of religion, and tell us that everything is denied by one party or another, and thence infer that nothing can be true. But he might as well draw the same inference from the diversified forms, in which the principle of reason has presented itself, whether in the absurd conduct of life, or in the strange history of opinions.

What then, I repeat, is the conclusion? It is this. Religion is true; I do not say that every religion is true. But I say that religion in general, is a true principle of human nature. I say, that there is a real science of religion, a deep-founded and unquestionable philosophy of religion, as truly as there is any other science or philosophy in the world. If experience is the test of truth, religion is true. If universality is the test of truth, religion is true. There never was a nation nor tribe found on earth, in which

the feelings of conscience and of adoration were not found. And he, who is ever, at any moment, shaken in his primary religious convictions by the bold assaults of skepticism, may justly rally, and fairly and fearlessly say to his assailant, if any thing in the world is true, religion is true.

II. So then do we lay the foundations of the religious principle ; and now let us proceed to consider, in the light proposed, the evidences of that religion, which we receive as bearing the special sanction of Heaven. And the observation to be made is, that the evidences of Christianity are to be weighed, as other evidences are weighed. And they are, in fact, just such proofs as may be rendered familiar to us, by what passes in every court of justice. In the first place, there are the Christian witnesses ; and such witnesses, indeed, as were never produced in any other cause ; men not only of unimpeachable character, of great and acknowledged virtue, but who have given in their writings the most extraordinary example of the absence of all enthusiasm that the world can show, — men, I say, and such men, who spent laborious and painful lives, and suffered bloody deaths, in attestation, not of some fancy or imagination in their own minds, not of their *belief* that they were *inspired* merely, but in attestation of certain manifest and miraculous facts. And then in the comparison of their testimonies, we have the strongest corroboration of their honesty and truth.

On the one hand, there are a few slight discrepancies between them, just sufficient to show that there could have been no collusion; and on the other hand, numerous and evidently undesigned coincidences, both with themselves and with contemporary profane writers, which put the strongest stamp of verisimilitude upon their narrations. And, then, again the moral character of these productions is such as to set their authors above all suspicion of disingenuity,—such as to show that dishonest and bad men could not have given birth to them, and such, in fact, as to constitute a strong, independent argument for their divine origin. But I confine myself now to this one branch of the evidence, the *testimony*; and I say that if such a weight of testimony were produced in a court of justice, all the records of judicial proceedings could show nothing stronger, or more satisfactory. I say that men are every day deciding and acting upon a tythe of the evidence that is offered to support the Christian religion. What if there *is* not anything amounting to the force of mathematical demonstration? The case does not admit it; and in the ordinary affairs of life, men do not demand it. Why shall they not, in religion, as in other things, act upon the evidence they have? Suppose that it is less clear to some than to others. Suppose, that it amounts with them only to a strong probability. Suppose that they have doubts. Do doubts paralyze them

in other cases? Does not a man make all sorts of sacrifices, become an exile, tread dangerous coasts, breathe tainted climes, for a distant and uncertain fortune? But has any body *told* him, that the wealth he seeks waits for him? Has any miracle been wrought before his eyes? Has God assured him, beyond any doubt, of the fruition of his hopes? Yet he ventures much, ventures all, for the chance of worldly fortune: can he venture nothing for the hope of heaven? Let him walk in the way of the Christian precepts. That cannot harm him, whether there be a future life or not. Let his conduct follow the weight of evidence. No reasonable being can gainsay or condemn him, for being governed by the strongest probability. This is the only safe or wise course. "Let him do the will of God, and he shall know of the doctrine whether it be from God." If he will not do this, if he is averse to the strictness of Christian virtue, he has cause enough to suspect the source of his skepticism. Nay, more; we have a right, in accordance with what is fairly claimed on other subjects, to demand of him, who would investigate the Christian evidences, a religious spirit, and a virtuous temper. He who should undertake to pronounce upon a great work of genius, a poem or a painting, without any cultivation or congeniality of taste, would be looked upon as an unqualified and presumptuous judge. By the same rule, he who

would fairly examine the evidences of a pure system of religion must, in reason, be a good and devout man ; else his investigation is nothing worth. Have infidels often considered this ? Have they generally approached the Christian evidences in this spirit ?

But let us take some notice, in the third place, and finally, of the Christian records. I say, then, that our Christian books *are to be regarded, in some important respects, as other books are.* Men, for instance, are not to take up the Bible and read it, as if they expected it to do them good, or give them light, in any unusual or unknown way. They are not to expect any illumination in perusing the Scriptures, other than that of reason and piety. Some other may be given in extraordinary cases, but they are not to require miracles. They are not to expect to understand this book because it is the Bible, in any other way, or upon any other principles of interpretation, than they would use to gather the meaning of any ancient book. And as many portions of the Bible, the speculative and controversial parts particularly, are clothed in the polemic phraseology of an ancient age, and have taken their hue and form from ancient disputes, states of mind, customs of society, &c., — as all this is true of some portions of Scripture, the unlearned reader cannot, without more information than most persons possess, reasonably expect to understand those parts at all.

Suppose that a plain reader, totally unacquainted with the systems of Plato or Aristotle, or with the Manichean philosophy, should, in perusing an ancient book, meet with a passage crowded with the terms and modes of thought borrowed from either of these systems. Can you doubt, that with the aid of any common sense he would at once say, "I do not understand this?" Would he not justly conclude that he must read other books, and make himself more acquainted with the speculations of that ancient period, before he could understand the passage which had fallen under his notice?

So he would judge of ancient profane writings, and so he ought to judge of ancient sacred writings. The wisdom that speaks in the two cases is different; but the method of interpreting that wisdom is the same in both. But so most Christian readers do *not* judge. They read the Bible, as if it were a modern book. Or, they feel as if it would dishonor the Bible, to suppose that any part of it were necessarily obscure or unintelligible to the unlearned reader. They look upon the Scriptures, as a direct revelation, or as the immediate and express word of God himself, rather than as a series of messages declaring, after the manner of the times, the will of God. And entertaining the former of these impressions, they rightly argue that a book, purporting to be a revelation to mankind, unless all men can readily un-

derstand it, is no revelation. But there can be no doubt, I presume, that this impression is a mistaken one. The sacred writers were commissioned to declare certain truths; and they were left to declare them after their own manner, and the manner of the age; and it is no more easy to understand the Bible, than it is to understand *any* ancient book. This *conclusion* must be admitted, whatever may be thought of the *reasoning*. Explain the doctrine of inspiration as we may, — it is an unquestionable truth, and every enlightened student of the Bible must know it, that there are considerable portions of it, which cannot be understood without much study, and without, to say the least, some learning, which the body of the people do not possess. Every sensible man, who has really studied his Bible, must know that this is the case with considerable portions of the Prophecies and Epistles. The people at large are reading these continually, and think to derive benefit from them, and do, no doubt, affix to them some vague meaning; but they do not and cannot understand them. They comprehend what is practical for the most part, and all that is essential; but much of what is speculative and controversial, I repeat it, with their present knowledge, they do not and cannot understand.

This may be a hard saying to many; but I believe it ought not, being unquestionably true, to be withheld. It may be an unpopular doctrine,

but that circumstance, I hope, does not prove it unimportant. There certainly is a mistake on this subject; and the greatness of the error is but the greater reason for correcting it. Besides, the error is far from being harmless. This constant reading of what is not well comprehended — this attempt to grasp ideas which are perpetually escaping through ancient and unintelligible modes of thought and phraseology, this formal and forced perusal of obscure chapters with a sort of demure reverence, tends to throw dulness, doubt, and obscurity over all our conceptions of religion. The Bible, too, instead of being a bond of common faith and fellowship to Christians, is made an armory for polemics. And there are some controversies among the body of Christians, which can never be intelligently and properly settled, till they qualify themselves in a better manner to understand the Scriptures. And yet multitudes of men and women are confidently deciding controversies on the most difficult questions of philology and interpretation, who never read — not Hebrew or Greek — but who never read a book on criticism, who never read a book on ancient customs, who never read a book on the circumstances of the primitive age, on the difficulties and disputes prevailing, on the Jewish prejudices or the Gentile systems of philosophy: — and if I were asked what I would give for the critical judgment of these men and women, I answer, *nothing* —

nothing at all. I derogate nothing from their general intelligence. And their judgment may be good, even on the point in question, as far as their common sense will carry them ; and upon the *general strain* of the Scriptures, they may judge well, and may come, *on the whole*, to a right conclusion. But upon deep questions of criticism, they ought not to pretend to judge. I give that credit to the modesty of many among us, as to presume that they do not undertake to decide upon matters of this sort ; and to those who have not this modesty, it may be fairly recommended as the first step of a good and sound judgment.

I would particularly guard what I have said on this subject from injurious misapprehensions. I certainly do not discourage the reading of the Scriptures. I only urge the needful preparation for it in regard to those parts which are hard to be understood. I do not say that unlearned Christians cannot understand their religion ; for their religion, in substance, is contained in passages that are level to the humblest apprehension. I do not disparage the Bible. Its value consists in the body of its undisputed truths and revelations. Besides, be the case as it may, it can be no disparagement of the sacred volume to state *what it is*. And that it does require study, and learning, to understand portions of it — what do all the labors of learned men, what do innumerable volumes of commentaries, and whole libraries of sacred criticism

show, if they do not show this? Why all these studies, let us ask, if unlearned men can understand the difficult and doubtful passages of their Bibles?

The truth is, in my judgment, that the body of mankind never ought to have been disturbed with those theological disquisitions which involve or require a deep knowledge of criticism, any more than they are with the subtilties of the law, or with the abstruse speculations of philosophy, the disputes of anatomists, metaphysicians, and men of science. General readers, not to say those who read not at all, are just as unable to understand one as the other. There are questions in religion, undoubtedly, which are proper for the general mass of readers. And there are points, doubtless, connected with every question, which are suitable for popular discussion. There must be discussion; and since men cannot agree, there must be dispute. Let there be controversy then; and let it range from the highest to the lowest subjects. All I would contend for is, that those controversies, which are addressed to the body of the people, be such as the people are prepared to understand; and that more curious questions be confined in religion, as in other things, to the learned. This reasonable discrimination would have cut off many disputes which, among the mass of the people, are perfectly useless, and might have saved us from some of our unhappy dissensions.

In fine, and to sum up my observations, let Religion — I do not say now as a matter of experience and practice — but let Religion, in its words, its subjects, and its controversies, be treated as other things are — as the Law, Medicine, or any of the Sciences. Let what is practical, what is easily understood, what the simple and sound judgment of a man can compass, be commended in religion, as in science, to all who can and will read it. Let what is abstruse, what is hard to be understood, what belongs to the department of profound criticism, be left for those who have opportunity, time, and learning for it. Let others read their writings as much as they please ; but let them not judge till they read ; let not their confidence outrun their knowledge. I think this is safe advice. I cannot conceive of any possible harm it can do. I believe it would do much good. I believe that it would tend to the promotion of a practical and affectionate piety among us ; and I think moreover, that it would do this special good : — it would lead men to rest their religious hopes and fears not on matters of doubtful disputation, but on those essential, moral, plain, practical grounds, which are the great foundations of piety and virtue.

I have now presented in a single light, the light of analogy, the first principles of religion, and the evidences and records of that particular dispensation of religion, which, as Christians, we have embraced. In my next lecture, I shall proceed to ex-

amine, in the same way, what is usually considered as the beginning of religion, or rather of religious character, in the human mind ; in other words, the doctrine of conversion.

DISCOURSE II.

**JOHN III. 3. — EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN, HE CANNOT
SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

It will help us to understand the subject of Conversion, and will prepare us to pursue the analogy proposed in this series of Discourses, to take a brief historical view of that language, by which, among theologians, the doctrine has been most commonly expressed : I mean that language which is founded on the figure of a new birth. Three views are to be taken of it : first, of its signification among the Jews ; secondly, of its use among the early Christian teachers ; and thirdly, of its application to modern Christian communities. And corresponding to this distinction, there are three kinds of conversion to be considered ; the Jewish, the ancient Christian conversion, and that which is to be urged among men, already Christian in their education and general belief.

Let me observe, in passing, that the phrases, “born again,” “new-creation,” &c., are not the only expressions in the New Testament, which are applied to the same subject : for men were required to be changed, to be turned from the error

of their ways, — were said to have passed from darkness to light, from the power of sin and Satan to the service of God and the wisdom of the just. In short, a very great variety of language was used to describe the process of becoming a good man, and a follower of Christ.

But the figurative expressions just referred to have been most constantly used in modern times, to express that change which is meant by conversion. The reason for this, I suppose, is obvious. There has been a striking and manifest disposition, ever since the primitive simplicity departed from religion, to regard and treat it as a mystery : and therefore the most obscure and mysterious expressions have, in preference, been adopted to set it forth. And yet, the figure in question, I shall soon have occasion to observe, is less adapted to set forth the spiritual nature of religion, than almost any of the representations that are current in the New Testament.

On every account, therefore, it is desirable that this language should be explained, and that the explanation should be fixed in our minds, even though it should require some repetition to do it.

What, then, is the meaning of the phrase “ being born again ? ”

I. When our Saviour said to the inquiring Nicodemus, “ Except a man be born again,” we may well suppose, that he did not use language either new or unintelligible to him. Nor would it com-

port with a proper view of our Saviour's character, to suppose that he used the language of mystery. Nicodemus, indeed, affected to think it mysterious, saying, "how can a man be born when he is old?" It was not, however, because he did not understand, but because he did understand it. For the language in question was familiar at that day; it was in the mouth of every Jew, much more in that of a master in Israel. We learn, from the Jewish writers of that day, that the phrase, "born again," was at that time, and had been all along, applied to proselytes from paganism. A convert, or a proselyte to the Jewish religion, was currently denominated, "one born again," "a new-born child," "a new creature." This language they adopted, doubtless, to express what they considered to be the greatness of the distinction and favor implied in being a Jew. It was nothing less than a "new creation." In the apparent misapprehension of Nicodemus, therefore, I see nothing but the astonishment natural to a Jew, on being told that he, favored of God as he had thought himself, — that he, one of the chosen people, must himself pass through another conversion, another proselytism, in order to see the kingdom of God

But to revert to the phrases, which conveyed to Nicodemus this unwelcome truth; I say that they referred originally to proselytism to the Jewish religion. This was the known signification of these phrases, at the time. There can be no dis-

pute or question on this point. Something like this use of these phrases, was common among other nations at that period, as among the Romans, the change from slavery to citizenship was denominated a new creation. It appears, then, as I have already observed, that this expression is not the best adapted to set forth the spiritual nature of religion, since it was originally used to describe a visible fact, an outward change.

II. But let us proceed from the Jewish use of this language, to the adoption of it among the first teachers of Christianity. It was natural that the Christian teachers, in calling men from an old to a new dispensation, from the profession of an old, to the reception of a new religion, should take up those expressions, which before had been applied to an event precisely similar. There was a visible change of religion required both of Jews and Pagans, the adoption of a new faith and worship. It was an event publicly declared and solemnized by the rite of baptism.

Far be it from me to say, that the Gospel required nothing but an outward profession and proselytism. This was too true of Judaism, though without doubt there were devout individuals among the Jews, who had more spiritual views. But it was too true of that nation of formalists, that they desired little more than to make proselytes to their rites and ceremonies. And on this account our Saviour upbraids them, in that severe

declaration, "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more a child of hell than yourselves : " — ye proselyte him to your own proud, Pharisaical, and conceited system of cabalistic notions and dead formalities. But surely, if there ever were upon earth, teachers who most strenuously insisted upon a spiritual renovation, they were Jesus and his Apostles. Still, however, we are not to forget, that their language, in reference to the change required, implied an outward proselytism, as well as a spiritual renovation ; implied the reception of a new religion, considered as a matter of speculation, faith and visible worship, as well as the adoption of inward feelings, accordant with the spirit and precepts of this religion. Both of these things they must have demanded by their very situation, as teachers of Christianity.

III. The way is now prepared to consider what meaning the language of our text is to have, when applied to *members of Christian communities in modern times*. And the discrimination to be made here is perfectly evident. One part of the meaning, anciently attached to this language, fails entirely : the other stands in the nature of things, and must stand for ever. What fails, is what relates to the outward change. There can be no proselytism to a new faith among us ; no conversion to a new worship ; no adoption of a new system, nor adherence to a new sect. All the conversion, there-

fore that can now take place, is of a purely moral or spiritual nature. It is a change of heart, a change of character, of feelings, of habits. Where the character, the feelings, and habits are wrong, and in such proportion as they are wrong, this change is to be urged as the very condition of salvation, of happiness, of enjoying peace of conscience, God's forgiveness, and the reasonable hope of heaven. "Except a 'bad' man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The subject, in this view of it, would seem to be exceedingly plain. Conversion is no mysterious doctrine. It is no peculiar injunction or precept of the Christian religion. It is the injunction and precept of every religion. The bad man must become a good man; the sinful must repent; the vicious must reform; the selfish, the passionate, and sensual, must be pure, and gentle, and benevolent; or they cannot be happy here, or hereafter. This, I say, is no mysterious doctrine. It is what every man's conscience preaches to him. Strange would it be, if, in a religion so simple and reasonable as ours, that on which everything in our moral welfare hangs, should be a mystery. Strange, if a stumbling-block should be placed at the very entrance to the way of religion.

But simple, obvious, and unquestionable as these views of conversion are, there is no little difficulty in obtaining for them a general assent, or in causing them to be fully carried out in the minds of

those who embrace them. The true and natural view of the subject is confounded with the ancient features of it. We are thinking of something like a proselytism, of a time, and an epoch, and a great experience, and a sudden change. We have, perhaps, been taught all this from our youth up. We have heard about obtaining religion, as if it were something else than obtaining inward habits of devotion, and self-government, and disinterestedness, and forbearance, and all goodness, which it takes a life fully to acquire and confirm. We have heard about obtaining religion, or obtaining a change, or obtaining a hope, as if it were the work of a month, or a day, or a moment. It demands years, or a life, to obtain a great property, or to obtain learning, or to build up a distinguished reputation ; while the far greater work of gaining a holy mind, a pure and good heart, you would suppose, from what you often hear, could be accomplished in a single week, or hour.

I do not forget that religion has its beginning ; and if the language in common use was, that at such a time, a man began to be religious, instead of having become so, I should have no objection to it. I do not deny that there are epochs in religious experience, times of deeper reflection, of more solemn impression, and more earnest prayer ; times of arousing to the moral faculties, of awakening to the conscience, of concern and solicitude about the interests of the soul ; and I would to

God, these times were more frequent in the experience of us all ! It was in conformity with this view, that Whitfield said, that he wished he could be converted a thousand times every day. I do not deny, then, that there are epochs in religious feeling. On the contrary, I believe that the whole progress of every mind, and of every life, may, to a considerable extent of its history, be dated from certain epochs. A man will find it to have been so in his mind and in his studies. Certain impressions have been made upon him at certain periods, in consequence of which he has taken up some new study, or pursued the old with greater zeal ; certain impressions which have given a bias and character to his whole mind. And those who are pursuing more visible acquisitions than those of the mind, may have found it so with them. At some certain period they began this work ; and at other periods they have been stimulated to new diligence ; they have resolved to use greater economy, industry and method. There is a beginning, then, and there are epochs in every pursuit ; but who ever thought of confounding, as men do in religion, the beginning with the end, the epoch with the progress, the starting place with the goal of attainment ? Who ever thought of calling the first enthusiasm of the youthful student, *learning*, or the first crude essays of the young artist, *skill* ?

Does it seem to any one, that I do injustice to the popular impressions about religion ? Am I

reminded that, although men do say that they get religion at a certain time, yet that they are taught, also, that they must grow in this, that they have acquired only the first elements, and must go on to perfection? Still I say, that the *language* is wrong; the language, which implies, that he who has acquired the first elements of such a thing, has acquired the thing itself, is wrong. But, I say more. I say it is a language that is liable to mislead. A man, who uses it, will be apt to think he has obtained more than he really has obtained. He will be apt to think more highly of himself, than he ought to think. His language implies too much, and of course it is liable to puff him up with pride; to make him think well of himself, and to speak slightly of others, rather than to awaken in him a proper and true humility; and to inspire a rash confidence and a visionary joy, rather than a just sobriety and a reasonable self-distrust. And I say still farther, and repeat, that there are false impressions about religion itself, derived from these notions of conversion. Religion is not felt to be that result of patient endeavor which it is. It is made a thing too easy of acquisition. He who, in one week, in one day, in one hour, nay, in one moment, can pass through a change that insures heaven to him, has reduced the mighty work to a light task indeed. He may boast over those who are taking the way of patient and pains-taking endeavor; he may charge

them with the guilt of insisting much on a good moral life ; but certainly he should not boast of his own way as the most thorough and laborious.

But I must dwell a little more particularly, in regard to conversion, on that comparison which I proposed to make between religion and other acquisitions of the mind. And the special point to be considered, the only one, indeed, about which there is any difference of opinion, is the alleged suddenness of conversion. I have already said that this is a feature of the change in question, which is borrowed from the ancient conversion, and borrowed too, from the outward and visible part of it. I now say that it cannot appertain to what is inward and spiritual. No change of the inward mind and character can be sudden. The very laws of the mind forbid it.

But I must not fail to show you that the comparison I am about to make is founded on the strictest analogy. It will be said, I know, that the change we are speaking of is unlike any other, and therefore, that the ordinary processes of the mind furnish no analogy for it. But in what is it unlike? It is a change ; a change of heart ; a change in the affections, dispositions, habits of the soul. Moreover, it is a change effected in view of motives. A man becomes a good man, not blindly, not irrationally, but for certain reasons. He feels that the evil course is dangerous, and therefore he resolves to turn from it. He believes

that there is happiness in religion, and therefore he seeks it. More than all, he feels that he ought to be a good man, and therefore he strives to be so. But still it may be said, there is a difference ; and that the difference consists in this ; that conversion is wrought in the soul by the special act of God ; that the work is supernatural ; that the change is a miracle. Grant that it be so. Suppose it to be true, perhaps it is true, that the secret reluctance of the mind to resist its wrong tendencies, and to restrain its evil passions is such, that a special act of God is always exerted to put it in the right way. But will God, who made the soul, who formed every part of its curious and wonderful mechanism, derange the operations of that soul, in order to save it ? Let any one say, if he pleases, that it is a dead soul, a mechanism without any motion, and that nothing but a special impulse from its Former can ever set it in motion. But when it does move, will it not move in obedience to the laws of its nature ? This, be it observed, is all that we say, to make out the assumed analogy. Let the cause of its operations be what it will, we say that the laws of its operations will be always the same ; in other words, that the religious action of the soul takes place after the same manner, follows the same processes, as all other action of the soul. This, certainly, is the testimony of all experience. No one finds himself becoming religious under any other influence than

that of motives of some sort. No man finds it an easier or speedier work to become a Christian, than to pass from ignorance to learning, from indolence of mind to activity, from low to lofty tastes, or from any one state of mind to any other. Our conclusion, then, is based on facts ; it is therefore the dictate of philosophy ; and it certainly is, so far as I know, the doctrine of all rational theology.

The processes of religious experience, therefore, are to be judged of like the processes of all other experience. Suppose, then, that you knew a man who was indolent in spirit and infirm of purpose ; and that you had sought and found the means, at some favoring moment, to arouse him from his lethargy, and to put him in the path of action. Would you say that in the hour of his first impression, of his first resolution, he had become a man of energy and firmness? Nay, how long would it probably be, before he could be justly said to bear that character? Or, suppose that you knew a parent who neglected the care of his children, and that, inviting him some day to your apartment, you had, by many reasonings, so impressed his mind with the dangers of this course of neglect, that he had resolved to amend ; and suppose that by the aid of many such impressions and resolutions, he should, at length, become a good parent. Would you say that you had sent him from your house that day, a good parent? If you did

so, I am sure that your sober neighbors would hold your language to be very strange, and would not a little suspect you of being no better than a credulous enthusiast. Or suppose once more, that having a friend who was devoid of all taste, you should suddenly open a gallery of pictures and statues to him, and thus rouse the dormant faculty. Would you say, on the strength of that first impulse to improvement, he had become a man of taste? Why, then, shall it be said, that a bad man, in bare virtue of one single hour of religious impressions, has become a good man? Religious affections have no growth peculiar to themselves, — no other growth than all other affections.

The phrase most frequently used to describe the suddenness of conversion is that of *obtaining religion*. It is said that, at a certain time, a man has "obtained religion." Now I am persuaded that, if we should separate religion into its parts, or view it under its practical aspects, no such phrase could be found, at any given moment, to apply to it. What would be thought of it, if it were said that, at any one moment, a man had obtained devotion, or a gentle disposition! Let a man undertake the contest with his anger; and how long will it take to subdue that passion to gentleness and meekness? How long will it be, before he will stand calm and unmoved, when the word of insult breaks upon his ear, or the storm of provocation beats upon his head! Or let him endeavor

to acquire a habit of devotion : and how many times will he have occasion bitterly to lament that his thoughts of God are so few and cold ; that he is so slow of heart to commune with the all-per-vading presence that fills heaven and earth ! Perhaps years will pass on, and he will feel that he is yet but beginning to learn this great wisdom, and to partake of this unspeakable joy. Or to take a word still more practical, — what would you think of a man who should say, that, at a certain time, he had obtained virtue ? “ What idea,” you would exclaim, “ has this man of virtue ? Some strange and visionary idea surely ! ” you would say, “ something different from the notion, which all other men have of virtue.” I cannot help thinking that this instance detects and lays open the whole peculiarity of the common impression about a religious conversion. Virtue implies a habit of feeling and a course of life. It is the complexion of a man’s whole character, and not one particular and constrained posture of the feelings. Virtue is not a thing that walks the stage for an hour, with a crowd around it ; it walks in the quiet and often lonely paths of real life. Virtue, in short, is a rational, habitual, long-continued course of feelings and actions. And just as much is religion all this. Religion is just as rational, habitual, abiding. What do I say ? Religion and virtue are the same thing in principle. Religion involves virtue as a part of itself. And in that part of it

which relates to God, it is still just as rational surely, and habitual and permanent in the mind, as in that part of it which relates to man. That is to say, piety is just as much so as virtue. And it is therefore as great and strange a mistake, for a man to say, that he obtained religion at a certain time, as it would be to say, that at a certain time he obtained virtue. Neither of them can be obtained so suddenly.

To sum up what I have said — conversion originally meant two things, an outward proselytism, and an inward change. It was the former of these only that was, or could be sudden and instantaneous. An idolater came into the Christian assembly and professed his faith in the true God, and in Jesus, as his messenger. This, of course, was done at a particular time. But this meaning of the term has no application to Christian communities at the present day. Or there was a certain time, when the Pagan or the Jew became convinced of the truth of the Christian religion, and therefore embraced it as his own. And hence it was that faith, rather than love, became the grand representative and denomination of Christian piety. This faith, like every result in mere reasoning, might have its birth and its complete existence on a given and assignable day, when some miracle was performed before its eyes, or some extraordinary evidence was presented. But these ideas ev-

idently cannot apply to nations brought up in the forms and faith of Christianity.

Anciently, then, conversion was sudden. It was so from the very necessity of the case. But from the same necessity of the case it cannot be so now. That which was sudden in conversion, the change of ceremonies, of faith, of worship, of religion, as a system, fails in its application to us ; while that which remains, the spiritual renovation of the heart, is the very reverse of sudden — it is the slowest of all processes.

The notice of one or two objections, that may be made to the views now stated, will, I think, clear up all further difficulties with the subject ; and with this, I shall conclude my discourse.

In the first place, if the bad man, when he resolves and *begins* to be a good man, is not a good man and a Christian, it may be asked, what is he ? and what is to become of him, if he dies in this neutral state ? That is to say, if as a bad man he is not to be condemned to misery, nor as a good man, to be raised to happiness, what is the disposition to be made of his future state ?

To the first question, what is he ? — I answer, that he is just a man who resolves and begins to be good, and that is all that he is. And to the second question, I reply, that he shall be disposed of, not according to our technical distinctions, but according to the exact measure of the good or evil that is in him. Let us bring these questions to the test

of common sense. If an ignorant man, who resolves and begins to learn, is not a learned man, what is he, and what will be his fate? If a passionate man, resolving and beginning to be meek, is not a meek man, what is he, and what is to become of him, in the great and just retribution of charactér? Do not these questions present and solve all the difficulties involved in the objection? They are difficulties that belong to a system of theology, which regards all mankind as either totally evil and unregenerate, or essentially regenerate and good; a system which appears to me as much at war with common sense and common experience, as would be that system of practical philosophy, which should account all men to be either poor or rich, either weak or strong, either miserable or happy, and admit of no transition states from one to the other.

In the next place, it may possibly be objected that the views, which I have advanced of a change of heart as slow and gradual, are lax and dangerous. Men, it may be said, upon this ground, will reason thus. "Since religion is the work of life, we need not concern ourselves. The days and years of life are before us, and we can attend to religion by and by." But because religion is the work of a whole life, is that a reason for wasting a fair portion of the precious and precarious season? Because religion is the work of every instant, is that a reason for letting many of them

pass unimproved? Because the work of religion cannot be done at once, because it requires the long progress of days and years, because life is all too short for it—is that a reason for never beginning? Because, in fine, the promise of heaven depends upon a character which it takes a long time to form, is that holding out a lure to ease and negligence? I know of no doctrine more alarming to the negligent than this; that the Christian virtue, on which the hope of heaven depends, must be the work not of a moment, but, at the least, of a considerable period of time.

Furthermore; that which is never commenced, can never be done. That which is never begun, can never be accomplished. Be it urged upon every one, then, that he should begin. Be it urged, with most solemn admonition, upon the negligent and delaying. I care not with how much zeal and earnestness he enters upon the work, if he will but remember, that in any given week or month he can only begin. I speak not against a sober and awakened solicitude, against the most solemn convictions, against the most anxious fears, the most serious resolutions, the most earnest and unwearied prayers. It is a work of infinite moment that we have to do. It is an infinite welfare that is at stake. It is as true now as it ever was, that “except a man be born again,” born from a sensual to a spiritual life, born from moral indolence and sloth to sacred effort

and watchfulness and faith,—born from a worldly to a heavenly hope, he cannot see the kingdom of God. No matter what we call it,—conversion, regeneration, or amendment,—it is the great thing. It is the burden of all religious instruction. Let no one be so absurd or so childish, as to say, that conversion is not preached among us, because the words, “regeneration,” “new creation,” “born again,” are not continually upon our lips. We use these words sparingly, because they are constantly misapprehended. But the thing,—the turning from sin to holiness, the forsaking of all evil ways by repentance, the necessity of being pure in order to being happy here and hereafter,—what else is our preaching, and your faith? What, but this, is the object of every religious institution, and precept, and doctrine? What, but this, is every dictate of conscience, and every command of God, and every admonition of providence? For what, but this, did Jesus die, and for what else is the spirit of God given? What, but this, in fine, is the interest of life, and the hope of eternity?

My friends, if I can understand any distinctions, the difference between the prevailing ideas of conversion, and those which I now preach to you, is, that the latter are out of all comparison the most solemn, awakening, and alarming. If the work of preparing for heaven could be done in a moment, then might it be done at any mo-

moment, at the last moment ; and the most negligent might always hope. I cannot conceive of any doctrine more gratifying and quieting to negligence or vice, than this. If in candor we were not obliged to think otherwise, it would seem as if it had been invented on purpose to relieve the fears of a guilty, procrastinating conscience. But our doctrine, on the contrary, preaches nothing but alarm to a self-indulgent and sinful life. It warns the bad man that the time may come, when, though he may most earnestly desire to prepare for heaven, it will be all too late. It tells him that no work of a moment can save him. As we tell the student preparing for a strict examination, that he must study long before he can be ready ; that no momentary struggle or agony will do it ; — so we tell him who proposes to be examined as a disciple of Christ, a pupil of Christianity, that the preparation must be the work of years, the work of life. My friends, I beg of you to ponder this comparison. It presents to you the naked truth. He, who would rationally hope for heaven, must found that hope not on the work of moments, but on the work of years ; not on any suddenly acquired frame of mind, but on its enduring habit ; not on a momentary good resolution, but on its abiding result ; not on the beginning of his faith, but on its end, its completion, its perfection.

DISCOURSE III.

LUKE XXII. 32. — AND WHEN THOU ART CONVERTED,
STRENGTHEN THY BRETHREN.

I AM to discourse this evening, on the methods of obtaining, and of exhibiting religious and virtuous affections. In selecting the text, I do not mean to say that it covers the whole ground of this two-fold subject ; but I have chosen it, partly because I wish to connect the first topic before us directly with my last discourse, and because the second topic, the methods of exhibiting religion, is distinctly presented, though not fully embraced by the injunction, “strengthen thy brethren.”

Let us now proceed to these topics — how we are to become religious — and how we are to show that we are so. On each of these questions, it is true, that a volume might be written ; and you will easily infer that I should not have brought them into the same discourse, if I had any other object than to survey them in a single point of view. That point, you are apprised, is the analogy of religion to other subjects, or to other states of mind.

To the question, then, how we are to obtain religious and virtuous affections and habits, the answer is, just as we obtain any affections and habits, which require attention and effort in order to their acquisition. They ought to be cultivated in childhood, just as the love of nature, or the habit of study, or any other proper affection or state of mind is cultivated. But if they are not ; if, as is too often the case, a man grows up an irreligious or vicious man, then, the first step towards a change of heart is serious reflection, and the next step is vigorous effort. The man must meditate, and pray, and watch, and strive. There is no other way to become good and pious, than this. There is no easier way.

And this is the point at which I wished to connect the topic under consideration with my last discourse. For it is not only true, that the demand for long continued effort, for a series of patient endeavors, as the passport to heaven, is more strict than the demand for a momentary change ; but the practical results of the difference are likely to have the most direct and serious bearing on the question before us. The question is, how is a man to become religious and good ? To this question, there are two answers. One is, that a man is to become religious and good by passing through a sudden change, — a change which, if not miraculous, has no precedent nor parallel in all other human experience. The other answer

is, that a man is to become religious and good, just as he is to become wise in learning, or skilful in art, so far as the mode is concerned ; that is, by the regular and faithful application of his powers to that end, by the repetition of humble endeavors, by the slow and patient forming of habits, by little acquisitions made day after day, by continual watchfulness and effort, and the seeking of heavenly aid. In the former case, the thing, that a man looks for, is a sudden and extraordinary change in his affections, wrought out by a special influence from above. And although much is to be done afterwards, yet till this is done, nothing is done. Much is to be done afterwards, it is true, as a matter of duty ; but nothing more is necessary to make out the title to heaven. There is to be a progressive sanctification as a consequence of the change ; but salvation depends on the change itself. Everything turns upon this mysterious point of conversion.

Now, can I be mistaken in thinking, that such a reference to this point must tend to derange the whole system of rational motives? Must it not take off the pressure and urgency of the natural inducements to act? Suppose, to resume the comparison, which I made in the close of my last discourse, that a man has before him a certain study to which he ought to attend. He is, perhaps, to be examined upon it a year hence, and on this examination is to depend his introduction

into professional life. And to make the parallel complete, suppose that he is averse to study. He is indolent. He puts off the matter to-day, and to-morrow ; one, two, or three weeks pass, and he has done nothing. But all the while the conviction is pressing harder and harder upon him, that this will never do ; that he must begin ; and at length he does begin, and proceed, and persevere ; nay, he comes to like his task ; he enjoys his industry more than ever he enjoyed his indolence ; he finishes the work, and gains an honorable place in a learned profession. Now, this man was placed under the natural and healthful influence of motives ; and it is under such influences I contend, and through such processes, that a man is to become a Christian. But suppose that this man, the candidate for literary honors, had been looking for some sudden and extraordinary change in his mind, which was to take place, when, or how, he could not tell ; it might be in the first month, or in the second, or even in the eleventh month of his probation ; a change, too, without which nothing could avail him, and with which, all was safe. Does not every one see that the pressure of ordinary motives is nearly taken off ? Does not every one see, that a man so circumstanced is very likely to go on, without ever applying himself thoroughly and resolutely to the work in hand ?

And what else, I am tempted to ask, is to

account for the apathy and neglect of multitudes towards the greatest of all concerns? Do not tell me, my brethren, that you have escaped this error, because you have embraced more rational ideas of conversion. It is an error, I fear, which has infected the religion of the whole world. Almost all men are expecting to become religious and devout in *some extraordinary way*; in a way for which the ordinary changes of character furnish no analogy. This is the fatal barrier of error that surrounds the world, and defends it from the pressure of ordinary motives. Evils and temptations enough, I know there are, *within* that barrier; but if there be anything without it,—if there be anything in the shape of opinion more fatal than everything else to religious attainment, it must be that which interferes with the felt necessity of immediate, urgent, practical, persevering endeavor! The doctrine of sudden conversion, I conceive, is precisely such an opinion. Let such a doctrine be applied to any other subject than religion, to the attainment of any mental habit, of learning or of art, and I am sure that it would be seen to have this fatal influence. And I fear that it has not only paralyzed religious exertion, but that it has the effect to deter many from all approach to religion; that to many, this extraordinary conversion is a mystery, and a wonder, and a fear. I apprehend that by many it is regarded as a crisis, a paroxysm, a fearful initiation into the secrets of

religion ; and that, in consequence, religion itself is regarded by multitudes, as the mysteries were in ancient times ; that is to say, as a matter of which they know nothing, and can know nothing, till they have passed the gate of initiation, till they have learnt the meaning of this solemn pass-word, conversion. Hence it is that vital religion is looked upon by the mass of the community, as a matter with which they have nothing to do ; they give it up to the Church, to converts, to the initiated ; and that, which should press down upon the whole world, like the boundless atmosphere, the religion of the sky, the religion of the universe, the religion of universal truth and all-embracing welfare, has become a flaming sword upon the gates of paradise !

I proceed now to the *exhibition* or manifestation of religion. And the rule here is, that a man should manifest his religious affections no otherwise, than as he manifests any serious, joyful, and earnest affections he may possess. This, I have no doubt, will appear to be the most interesting and effective, as well as the most proper display of them.

Exhibition, manifestation, display on such a subject, are words, I confess, which are not agreeable to me ; and on this point, I shall soon speak. That is seldom the most powerful exhibition of character, which a man makes on set purpose. And therefore I should say, even if it were con-

tended that religion is a peculiar cause committed to the good man, which he is bound to advocate and advance in the world by peculiar exertions, still that he will not ordinarily so well succeed by direct attempt, as by an indirect influence.

But let us take up, for a few moments, the general subject. We are speaking of religious manifestation ; and, I say, that a man's religion is to assume no peculiar appearances, because it is religion. I do not say, *no* appearances appropriate to itself. All traits and forms of character have, to a certain extent, their appropriate disclosures. So far, religion may have them ; but, in consistency with good sense, no farther. Our Lord said to Peter, "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." A good man should strengthen his brethren ; but, in order to do this to the best purpose, he is to strengthen his brethren in religion, no otherwise than he would strengthen his brethren in patriotism, in learning, or in any other cause. That is to say, he is to be governed by the general and just principles of mutual influence. He is to give his countenance, his sympathy, his counsel on proper occasions ; but he is not to go about exhorting at all corners, assuming an air of superiority, speaking in oracular and sepulchral tones ; if he does so, he will be liable to be considered intrusive, impertinent, and disagreeable. I would speak with a sacred caution on this point. I would quench no holy fire. Our fault is too

liable to be reserve. And well can I conceive that there may be times, when a man may fitly and solemnly say, "stand fast, my brother, keep thine integrity;" or emergencies of social temptation, when the zealous Christian may say, "let us strengthen each other's hands, and encourage each other's hearts in the holy cause of duty." The same thing may be done in every other cause, whether of justice, or humanity. All that I contend for is, that the same good sense, the same courtesy, the same liberality, shall govern a man in one case, as in the other.

Undoubtedly, a religious and good man will appear on many occasions differently from another man, and differently, in proportion as he is religious and good. But he will not appear so *always*, nor in things indifferent. There may be nothing to distinguish him in his gait, his countenance, or demeanor. Still there will be occasions, when his character will come out;—many occasions. His actions, his course of life, his sentiments, on a great many occasions, will show his character. And these sentiments he will express in conversation; so that his *conversation* will be thus far different. But still the disclosures of his character will all be natural. He will show you that he is interested in religion, just as he shows you that he is interested about everything else, by natural expressions of countenance, and tones of voice, by natural topics of conversation, and

habits of conduct. In short, there will be an appropriate exhibition of religious character, but nothing singular or strange.

Now, for multitudes of persons, this will not do ; it is not enough. They want something peculiar. There are many, indeed, who are not satisfied, unless there is something peculiar in the looks and manners of a man to mark him out as religious. Who does not know how constantly a clergyman has been, and still is, to a great extent, known, everywhere, by these marks ? And what is more common, than for the new convert to put on a countenance and deportment, which causes all his acquaintance to say, "how strangely he appears !" And many, I repeat, would have it so. They would have a man not only belong to the kingdom of Christ, but carry also some peculiar marks and badges of it. They would have him wear his religion as a military costume, that they may know, as they say, under what colors he fights. But let us remember, that many a coward has worn a coat of mail, and many a brave man has felt that he did not need one. And many a bad man, I would rather say many a misguided man, has put on a solemn countenance, and carried a stiff and formal gait, and got all the vocabulary of cant by heart ; and many a good man has felt that he could do without these trappings of a mistaken and erring piety. Nor let it be forgotten, that just in proportion as this pe-

culiarity of religious manifestation prevails, hypocrisy prevails. It is easier to put on a costume, than it is to adopt a real character. Religion, for its own defence against pretenders, as well as for its usefulness in the world, should demand sobriety, simplicity, naturalness, and truth of behavior, from all its votaries.

I do not mean, in saying this, to confound sanctimony with hypocrisy, or bad taste with bad morals. The same distinctions apply to this, as to every other subject. A man of real learning *may* be a pedant. A man of real skill may lack the simplicity which is its highest ornament. A really able statesman may practise some finesse. A truly wise man may put on an air of unnecessary gravity, or be something too much a man of forms. But we all agree that these are faults. We always desire that all unnecessary peculiarities should be laid aside, that no man should obtrude upon others his gifts or qualifications; that he should leave them to speak when they are called for. In other words, we demand good breeding in every other case; and I say emphatically, that good breeding is equally to be demanded in religion. No man is the worse Christian for being a well-bred man; nor is he, for that reason, the less decided Christian.

Next to the general manners as modes of exhibiting religion, a more specific point to be considered is religious conversation. A man usu-

ally talks, it is said, about that which is nearest his heart ; and a religious man, therefore, will talk about religion. Every observing person, we may notice in passing, must be aware that there are many exceptions to this remark — that there are not a few individuals in the circle of his acquaintance, who are not, by any means, communicative on the subjects that must deeply interest them. But there is a still more important distinction in regard to the subject-matter itself.

It is this. A man may talk religiously, and yet not talk about religion, as an abstract subject. A good and devout man will show that he is such by his conversation ; but not necessarily by his conversing upon the abstract subjects of devotion and goodness. He will show it by the spirit of his conversation, by the cast and tone of his sentiments, on a great many subjects. You will see, as he talks about men and things, about life and its objects, its cares, disappointments, afflictions, and blessings, about its end, and its future prospects — you will see that his mind is right, that his affections are pure, that his aspirations are spiritual. You will see this, not by any particular phraseology he uses, not because he has set himself to talk in any particular manner, not because he intended you should see it, but simply because conversation is ordinarily and naturally an expression and index of the character. I am not denying that a good man may talk about religion as an ab-

stract subject, or about religious experience as the express subject. All may do this, at times ; some, from the habit of their minds, may do it often. But what I say is, that this, with most men, is not necessarily nor naturally the way of showing an interest in religion.

And to prove this, we need only ask how men express, by conversation, their interest in other subjects ; how they exhibit other parts of their character, through this medium — this breathing out of the soul in words. A man talks affectionately or feelingly ; you see that this is the tone of his mind ; you say that he is a person of great sensibility ; but does he talk about affection, or feeling, or sensibility, in the abstract ? A man talks intelligently ; but does he talk about intelligence ? Or is it necessary that he should discourse a great deal about good sense, or be perpetually saying what a fine thing knowledge is, in order to convince you that he is an intelligent man ? Here is a circle of persons, distinguished for the strength of their family and friendly attachments. All their actions and words show that kindness and harmony dwell among them. But now, what would you think, if they should often sit down and talk in set terms, about the beauty of friendship, or the charms of domestic love ? So strange and unnatural would it be, that you would be inclined to suspect their sincerity. You might, indeed, fairly infer one of two things ; either that

love and friendship with them were matters of mere and cold sentiment, or that these persons had utterly mistaken the natural and proper method of exhibiting their affections.

But there is another kind of religious conversation, which, beyond all others, is thought to furnish the clearest evidence of a man's piety ; and that is, his conversing much with thoughtless or unregenerate persons, *with a view to making them religious*. Now here, we are to keep in view the same distinction, that is applied to religion in general. A religious man may well desire to make others religious by his conversation. He may, on proper occasions, converse with them for this very end. But to do this, he need not talk about religion in the abstract, nor expressly about the religious good of the persons he converses with. There may, indeed, be times and relations, in which this personal appeal should be made ; but it should not be done as a matter of course and of set form. A man may impress his acquaintances in this way, I know. He may make them feel strangely and uncomfortably. He may create in them a sort of preternatural feeling. He may awaken, terrify, distress them. He may, then, by such means, make an impression upon them ; but it will not be a good impression. It is planting in the mind the seeds of superstition, which a whole life, often, is not sufficient to eradicate. It is through this process that religion is, with so many persons, a

strange, uncongenial, terrifying, distressful, gloomy thing, to their dying day. Why is it not apparent to every one, that this method of proceeding is unnatural, unwise, inexpedient? It is not with religion, that men are impressed in this case, so much as with the manner in which it is presented, with its aspects and adjuncts. And there is reason to fear, that with many religion itself becomes a thing of aspects and circumstances, rather than of the spirit; that it becomes, in its possessor, a peculiarity, rather than a character; a posture and often a distorted posture of mind and feeling, rather than the mind and feeling itself. Men are not *accustomed* to talk about abstract subjects, nor about the soul, as an abstract subject. And if you approach them — awkwardly, as you must do in such a case — and put such questions as, “whether they have obtained religion,” or, “what is the state of their souls,” they will hardly know what to do with such treatment; they will not know how to commune with you. They may, indeed, if they have a great respect for you, sit down, and listen to the awful communication, and be impressed and overcome by it. But is this the way to exert a favorable and useful influence upon them? Do but consider if this is the way in which men are favorably and usefully impressed on other subjects. A man has a quarrel with his neighbor. You wish to dispose him to peace and reconciliation. Do you begin with asking him what is the state of

his soul? Do you ask him whether he has obtained peace? Do you begin to talk with him about the abstract *doctrines* of peace and forgiveness? Let a sensible man be seen communing with his neighbor in a case like this, and he will be found to adopt a far more easy, unembarrassed, and natural mode of communication. And, in any case, whether you propose to enlighten the ignorant, to quicken the indolent, or to restrain the passionate, every one must know, that a course would be pursued, very different from that which is usually resorted to, for recommending religion.

I have now spoken of the general manners, and of conversation in particular, as modes of exhibiting religion.

But on the general subject of *exhibiting religion*, I have one observation to offer in close. I have spoken, in this discourse, of exhibiting or manifesting religion, because I could find no other brief and comprehensive phrase which would convey the idea; but I am afraid that these phrases themselves are liable to carry with them an erroneous idea. If a man of high intelligence or cultivated taste should think much of exhibiting his intelligence or taste, we should say that he is not very wisely employed. He might, indeed, very properly think of it, if he had fallen into any great faults on this point; and it is for this reason that we have desired the religious man to do this. But after all, exhibition is not the thing. And the observation,

therefore, which I have to make, is this ; that the more a man thinks of cultivating religion, and the less he thinks of exhibiting it, the more happy will he be in himself, and the more useful to others. That which is within us, it has been said, "will out." Let a man possess the spirit of religion, and it will probably, in some way or other, manifest itself. He need not be anxious on that point. On the contrary, there are no persons who are more disagreeable ; there are scarcely any who do a greater disservice to the cause of virtue, than *pattern* men and women. Hence it is that you often hear it said, "we cannot endure perfect people." The assumption, the consciousness of virtue, is the most fatal blight upon all its charms. Good examples are good things ; but their goodness is gone the moment they are adopted for their own sake. A noble action performed for example's sake, is a contradiction in terms. Let it be performed in total unconsciousness of anything but the action itself, and then, and then only, is it clothed with power and beauty.

I do not mean to dissuade any good man from acting and speaking for the religious enlightenment and edification of others ; I advocate it ; but that is effort, not exhibition. Yet even then, I would say, let no man's religious action or speech go beyond the impulses of his heart. Let no man be more religious in his conversation, than he is in his character. The worst speculative evils in the

popular mind about religion, I fear, are the mingled sense of its unreality, on the one hand, and of its burthensomeness on the other, which spring from the artificial treatment it has received from its professed votaries. Away with set phrases, and common-places, and monotones, and drawlings, and all solemn dulness!—and let us have truth, simplicity, and power. The heart of the world will answer to that call, even as the forests answer and bend to the free winds of heaven; while amidst the fogs and vapors that rise from stagnant waters, it stands motionless, chilled, and desolate.

DISCOURSE IV.

CAUSES OF INDIFFERENCE AND AVERSION TO RELIGION.

LUKE XVI. 8. — FOR THE CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD ARE IN THEIR GENERATION WISER THAN THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT.

I AM to speak in this discourse of the causes of indifference and aversion to religion, and my special purpose, in pursuance of the analogy which I am following out in these discussions is, to inquire, whether the same causes would not make men indifferent or averse to any other subject, however naturally agreeable or interesting to them. Let philosophy, or friendship, or native sensibility; let study, or business, or pleasure even, be inculcated and treated as religion has been, and would not men be averse to them?

It is possible that I have a hearer who will think that he solves the problem by saying, that men's aversion to religion is owing to the wickedness of their hearts. That would be to solve a problem with a truism. The aversion to religion *is* wickedness of heart. I am sensible, and it will be more apparent as we proceed, that this is to be said with

important qualifications. But still it is true that 'this state of mind is wrong. And the question is, why does this wrong state of mind exist? In other words, from whence is this aversion to religion? It may be said, with more pertinence I allow, that the cause is to be found in the depravity of human nature. This *is*, indeed, assigning a cause. And it is, moreover, bringing the subject to a point, on which I wish to fix your attention. For so far from admitting this to be true, I think it will be easy to show that men may be made, and *are* made, indifferent or averse to worldly objects, to objects allowed to be congenial to their nature, by the same causes which make them indifferent or averse to heavenly objects, — the objects of faith and duty.

I. The first cause which I shall mention is *neglect*. There are many sciences, and arts, and accomplishments, which are most interesting, and naturally most interesting to those who cultivate them, but entirely indifferent to those who neglect them. We see this every day. We find different men in the opposite poles of enthusiasm and apathy, on certain subjects; and the reason is, that some have been familiar with them, and others have been completely estranged from them. The most interesting and fascinating reading has no attraction for those, who have passed the most of their lives without ever taking up a book. It is, in short, a well-known law of our minds, that atten-

tion is necessary to give vividness and interest to objects of human thought.

The first cause of indifference to religion, then, is neglect. It may be said that all are taught; that the subject is constantly urged upon their attention from the pulpit. But the example and daily conversation of their parents and friends, who have showed no interest in religion, have been more powerful far than the words of the preacher. The real and effective influences of their education have all tended to neglect. The actual course of their conduct has come to the same thing. They have never attended to religion, either as the merchant attends to business, or as the farmer attends to soils, or the mechanician to his art, or, — to come nearer to the point, — as the student attends to philosophy, or as the virtuoso to matters of taste, or even as the sketching traveller attends to scenery, or as the man of pleasure to amusement; or, in fine, as any man attends to anything in which he would be interested. It is not in this way, at all, that they have thought of being religious, but in some more summary, in some extraordinary way: and multitudes, who would think it preposterous to expect to be interested in a literature or language, of which they have never read anything, have never in their lives attentively read one book about religion, not even the Bible.

I am quite sensible, while I make these compar-

isons, that there is a general attention to religion more important than any specific study of it : an attention, that is to say, to the monitions of conscience, to experience, to the intimations of a providence all around us, to the great example of Christ that ever shines as a light before us. But it is this very attention, as well as the specific study, in which men have been deficient. And then, as to the specific study, I say, it is to be advocated on grounds similar to those which recommend it in every other case. A man may be religious without reading books, I know. So may he be an agriculturalist or mechanician without reading books. But the point to be stated, for him who reads at all, is that he will read on the subject on which he wishes to be informed and interested ; and so we may say, that he, who studies at all, will study on the subject that is nearest his heart ; and that he, who adopts forms and usages in any case, will avail himself of forms and usages in this. So that he, into whose life no specific religious action enters, gives no evidence of general attention.

Still, then, I repeat, there must be attention, both general and particular. No man can reasonably expect to be religious without it. It is not enough passively to be borne on with the wave of worldly fashion, now setting towards the church, and now towards the exchange, and now towards the theatre. It is not enough to be as religious as chance, and time, and tide will make us.

There must be a distinct, direct religious action, a hand stretched out, an eye looking beyond, a heart breathing its sighs and secret prayers for some better thing. But with multitudes this distinct action of the soul has never been put forth. And it is no more surprising that they are not Christians, than it is that they are not astronomers or artists.

II. The next cause of indifference and aversion to religion is to be found in the character, with which some of its most attractive virtues are commonly invested. Let us consider a few of these, and compare them with other affections and sentiments.

One of the Christian virtues, much insisted on, is *love of the brethren*. The analogous sentiment is friendship. Now I ask, would friendship be the attractive quality that it is, if it were inculcated and represented in the same way as love of the brethren? If friendship were constantly insisted on, as a test of character, as the trying point on which all future hopes rest; if a man were constantly asked whether he loves his friends, in the same way in which he is asked whether he loves the brethren, and thus were made to tremble when that question is asked; if, then, the affection of friendship were required to be exercised with so little reference to all the natural charms and winning graces of character; if, again, friendship must find its objects within a sphere so limited,

among men of a particular sect, or among church-members only, or among speculative believers of a certain cast ; and if, moreover, friendship were to express itself by such methods as brotherly love usually does, by set and precise manners, by peculiar actions, by talking of its elect and chosen ones, as Christians have been wont to talk of each other : if, I say, all this belonged to friendship, do you think it would wear to men's eyes the charm and fascination that it now does ? Would they rush to its arms — would they seek it, and sigh for it, as they now do ? No ; friendship itself would lose its grace and beauty, if it were set forth as the love of the brethren usually is. No wonder that men are averse to such an affection. But would they have been equally averse to it, if it had been represented as but a holier friendship ; the friendship of good men — which it is, and which is all that it is ?

Again ; hope is a Christian virtue. It is also natural affection ; and as a natural affection, it attracts every human heart. It “springs eternal” and irresistible in every human breast. Its eye kindles, and its countenance glows, as it gazes upon the bright future. But would it be this involuntary and welcome affection, if it bore the character that evangelical hope has assumed, in the experience of modern Christians ? I say of modern Christians ; for the ancient hope was a different thing. It was the hope of those “who

sat in the region and shadow of death," that they should live hereafter : it was a hope full of immortality ; full of the sublimity and joy of that great expectation. But now, what is the modern feeling that bears this name, and how does it express itself ? It says with anxiety, and often with a mournful sigh, " I hope that I am a Christian, — I hope that I am pardoned, — I hope that I shall go to heaven." Would *any* human hope be attractive, if this were its character ? Is it strange that men do not desire to entertain a hope, that is so expressed ?

Once more ; faith holds a prominent place among the Christian virtues. In its natural form, it is one of the most grateful of all affections. Confidence — confidence in our friend — what earthly repose is equal to this ? The faith of a child in its parent — how simple, natural, irresistible ! And how perfectly intelligible is all this ! But now do you throw one shade of mystery over this affection ; require it to assent to abstruse and unintelligible doctrines ; require of it a metaphysical accuracy ; demand it, not as the natural, but as some technical or mystical condition of parental favor ; resolve all this into some peculiar and ill-understood connexion with the laws of the divine government ; and the friend, the child would shrink from it ; he would forego the natural affections of his heart, if they must be bound up with things so repulsive and chilling to all its confiding and joyous sensibilities.

I may observe here, that these three virtues — brotherly love, hope, and faith — derived from the circumstances of the early age a prominence and a peculiarity, which ought since to have passed away. When the Christians were a comparatively small and persecuted band, and had a great cause committed to their fidelity, it was natural and proper that the tie between them should be peculiar. Hence their letters to one another were constantly filled with such expressions as, “salute the brethren,” “greet the brethren.” Those brethren were perhaps one hundred or five hundred persons in a city; known and marked adherents of the new faith — who met together in dark retreats, in old ruins, in caves or catacombs. But all this has passed away. And now it would be absurd for a man, however affectionately and religiously disposed, in writing letters to any town or city, to send salutations and greetings to all the good people in those places. Christians now stand in the general relation to one another of good men; not of fellow-sufferers, not of fellow-champions of a persecuted cause. It is precisely the difference between compatriots fighting for their liberty, and fellow-citizens quietly enjoying it.

In like manner, Christian faith, when it was necessarily the first step in religion, when it came to fill the void of skepticism; and Christian hope, when it sprung from the dark cloud of despair, both derived from the circumstances a singular

character and a signal importance. And the circumstances justified a peculiar manner of speaking about them. Hope was indeed a glorious badge of distinction in a world without hope : and faith was, indeed, a pledge for the highest virtue, when it might cost its possessor his life. But *now* to speak of faith and hope with a certain mysterious sense of their importance, is to present them in a false garb ; it is to clothe, with an ancient and strange costume, things that ought to be familiar ; and it is therefore to cut them off from our natural sympathy and attachment.

III. The third cause of indifference and aversion to religion, and the last which I shall mention, but on which I shall dwell at greater length than I have upon the former, is to be found in the mode of its inculcation.

To show that men may be made averse to objects naturally and confessedly interesting to them, by an unfortunate teaching, and to point out the manner of that teaching, I shall draw two illustrations from the pursuit of knowledge.

It will not be denied, that for knowledge in general the human mind has a natural aptitude and desire. But do the children, in the most of our schools, love the knowledge that is inculcated there ? Have they associated agreeable ideas with their class-books and school-rooms, and with the time they pass in them ? What is the occasion of this insufferable tediousness that so many of them

experience, in the pursuits of elementary learning? How is it, that they so often find the form, on which they sit, an almost literal rack of torture, and the hours of confinement lengthening out like the hours of bondage? Do we talk of men's aversion to religion? Why, here is aversion to knowledge, as strong and obstinate, as that of hardened vice itself to religion. What causes it? Not that nature, which was as truly made to love knowledge, as appetite to love food; but circumstances have disappointed the natural want, till it is perverted and stupefied, so that it scarcely appears to belong to the nature of the human being.

Again; the science of astronomy is held, by all who understand it, to be a most interesting — an almost enchanting science. No one can doubt that, if properly introduced to the mind, it would prove extremely attractive and delightful. Nor let it be said, to destroy the parallel which I am exhibiting, that knowledge has no natural obstacles in the mind to contend with, while religion has many. Religion finds obstructions, indeed, in human nature, but so also has knowledge to contend with the love of ease, with sloth, with physical dulness, with pleasure, and worldly vanity.

Now suppose that the teacher of astronomy comes forward to instruct his pupil; and that he at once adopts a very unusual, very formal, and repulsive manner; that he tells him with reiterated assurance that he *must* learn this science, and

yet fails to show any very perceptible connexion it has with his interest, his dignity, or happiness. Suppose further, that the teacher informs his pupil, that he has the strongest natural aversion to the science in question ; that this aversion is so strong as to amount to an actual inability to comprehend it ; that it is absolutely certain that he never will learn it of himself ; that his only chance of success lies in the interposition of divine power ; that all his exertions to learn give him no claim to understand what he is inquiring after ; that if he succeeds, it will be no merit of his, and that if he fails he will be utterly ruined, and for ever miserable, and will richly deserve to be so. Suppose, I say, all these influences to attach themselves to one of the most beautiful sciences ever commended to the human mind ; suppose all the stronger instructions, the fearful agitations, the tremendous excitements of hope and fear, the unnatural postures of mind, the violence to reason, the mocking of effort, the mysteries of faith, and the extravagancies of conduct, that must arise from so extraordinary an intellectual condition of things ; and do you believe that any object or pursuit would be likely to be loved in such circumstances ? Would you say, in such a case, that the science in question had any fair chance or trial ?

But let us now come to the direct teaching of religion itself. What are the causes that prevent its grateful and hearty acceptance ? What are

the causes, I mean, which exist in the teaching itself; for I am not, at present, concerned with those which exist in the perverseness of the human will. To this question, I shall answer, that the teaching is apt to be too formal, too direct, and too abstract.

First, it is apt to be too formal. The parent, the teacher, the friend, does not neglect the subject, perhaps, nor does he misconceive it; his views are rational and just; he sees what religion is, and would teach it; but how does he teach it? Himself, perhaps, possessing but little of holy familiarity with its objects, he speaks to his child or his pupil, with a constrained manner; speaks, as if he were set to do it, and as if it were a task. He feels the duty of imbuing with religious sentiment the mind that is committed to him, but the gentle and holy voice is not in his own heart, and without intending it, he adopts an artificial tone. He speaks on this subject as he speaks on no other. His words want all the winning grace and charm of natural sensibility. In short, he is a formalist in religion, and a formalist in teaching it. Formal as all other kinds of education have been, none has been so dreadfully smitten with this taint, as catechising, and the inculcation of Bible lessons, and the teaching of prayers, and talking of God.

Now, everything unnatural in manner is repulsive to us. It is scarce speaking too strongly,

to say, that we hate it. We fly from it when we are children ; we revolt from it when we are men. There is nothing in social manners that is more intolerable than affectation. But especially, I think, is it the instinct of children to shrink from everything formal in manner. Their minds put forth every power of resistance to it, as their limbs would resist the compression of some torturing instrument. Might religion but have come forth from all its artificial peculiarities, and forms of singularity, and fetters of restraint ; might it have talked with us as other things talk with us ; might it only have won us, as kindness, friendship, love win us ; how different would now have been the state of religious sentiment and affection, in the hearts of thousands around us !

I am speaking of direct influences ; and I now add, that they may be too direct for the best impression. Perhaps, indeed, it is one of the inevitable errors of the formalist, to make them so. He, who is not heartily and wholly interested in religion, will be very apt to make the inculcation of it a set business ; and then it certainly *will* be too direct. It will take the form of direct command, and say, "you must do this or that ; you must love God !" rather than express itself in easy and unrestrained and unpremeditated conversation. I am inclined, indeed, to say that, in general, the strongest feelings choose indirect modes of manifestation. I remember once to have heard of a

prayer on a very affecting occasion, and where the speaker was most of all interested, in which it was said, that every word bore reference to the occasion, and yet the occasion was never once directly alluded to. I confess that that appeared to me, as the very highest description, that could be given, of delicate and strong sensibility. It is not necessary to be direct in order to be impressive; the very contrary is more apt to be true. And he who can think of no way to impress religion, but broad, open-mouthed, and urgent exhortation or entreaty, understands neither religion nor human nature.

The common fault of parents certainly is, to do too little; but there are ways in which they may do too much. I have often thought that nothing can be worse, than to be always pointing out *the moral of a story* to children. They do it for themselves; and for another to do it for them, after they have done it, is often felt by them to be degrading and irritating. I think that some of the worst children and young people, that I have ever known, are those, into whose ears moralities and fine sentiments have been for ever dinned with wearisome repetition and minuteness. This accounts for the false maxim which you sometimes hear, that the best parents often have the worst children. Such parents, I know, are often what are called very good people, very exemplary persons; extremely anxious, they are said to be, for

the improvement of their children ; and so they are in a sense ; and yet I have been sometimes tempted to say, that heartless, formal, wearisome domestic lecturers on religion and virtue, do more hurt than any people in the world. The worst and most abandoned of men make *vice* odious ; *they* make *virtue* so. And the feelings of the children, bad and insensible as they are apt to become, do really evince, though unhappily, the dignity of human nature ; they show that virtue was not designed to be poured into the ear in dinning precepts or dull complaints, but to be the offspring of an inward energy, self-wrought, self-chosen ; influenced, indeed, by arguments from without, but drawing its own inference, bringing out, from communion with itself and with the spirit of God, its own free and glorious result.

I shall not be thought, certainly, in these remarks, to oppose the religious education of children. I am speaking of the form of teaching, and not of the fact. The only question is about the best mode ; and into this, I maintain, that less of direct inculcation and more of indirect influence, should enter, than is common. Nay, I maintain that the stern and solemn inforcement of lessons and readings has effectually alienated many from religion. It was the manner, I repeat, rather than the act. The Bible may certainly be taught, and catechisms may be taught in the form of direct lessons ; they may be successfully taught,

if the manner be easy and kindly ; and, I think, that Sunday schools, where a large company of children are brought together, and the free and joyous spirit of childhood pervades the place, are likely to give freedom and ease to the manner of teaching. Religious teaching is thus becoming like common-school teaching, and on this account, is doubtless exposed to some dangers ; but it is likely to have the advantage of throwing off the usual manner of direct, peculiar, superstitious appeal to the heart, singling out its object, and fixing upon it the eye of authority and warning. So important and critical is this point of *manner*, that a visible and painful anxiety to have a child excel in anything, even in virtue, does not appear to me to be wise ; to urge even this, by constant hints and exhortations, and especially with an air of dissatisfaction and complaint, is not expedient. The human affections are not to be won in this way. They are not so won to other objects ; why should we expect them by such means to be attracted to religion ?

Finally, as we teach religion too formally, and often too directly, so do I think that we teach it too abstractly. There is one particular affection on which I shall bring this observation to bear, and that is the love we should cherish towards our Creator. To this sentiment, I allow that there are some natural obstacles. They are found in the invisibility and infinity of the divine nature.

These obstacles, I think, however, are exaggerated ; and they are, by no means, so great as those which are created by our own mistakes.

When children are acquiring their first ideas of God and of their duty to him, I apprehend that many things are taught and told them, which, although true and right in themselves, are inculcated too abstractly ; that is, too little with reference to the minds that are to receive them. The parent teaches his child, as the first thing, perhaps, that God *sees* him continually, in the darkness and in the light ; and the thought of that awful eye fixed upon him distresses and frightens him. Or the child is taught with too little explanation, that God is displeased, is angry with him, when he does wrong ; and how little does he understand the considerate and compassionate displeasure of his Creator ! Or he is taught to pray, and obliged to go through with that formal action, without its being made a sufficiently sincere, grateful, and real homage. And he is especially taught all this on Sunday. Sunday, he is told, is the Lord's day. And it is made to him, perhaps, the most disagreeable day in the week. Alas ! how far does the experience of those tedious hours, penetrate into his life, and into the whole religious complexion of his being ! How often is that hurtful influence reasoned away, and how often does it come back again, and disturbs, perhaps, the most rational Christian, even on his dying bed !

The first idea, it should be remembered, which a child can gain at all, of moral qualities, is from the experience of his own heart. That is the undoubted, and now conceded philosophical truth. *There*, then, should begin the child's idea of God. From the love within him, he should be taught that God loves all beings. And so, from the moral approbation or displeasure he feels in himself, he should be taught how God approves the good and condemns the bad. Next, his parent should be to him the image of God; and from his love of that parent, and from all that parent has done for him, he should be led to consider how easy, and how reasonable it is, that he should love God. God should be made a present being to him, near and kind, and not the image of a being, a monarch or a master, seated on a throne, in the far distant heavens.

The common method of teaching, I fear, instead of this, is extremely artificial, technical, and constrained, and very little adapted to make any clear or agreeable impression. And I am persuaded, that the same method adopted in regard to an earthly parent, would powerfully tend to repress the filial sentiment towards him.

Let me dwell upon the comparison a moment, and with a view to illustrate the three faults of inculcation on which I have now been insisting. In order to make the cases, as far as may be, parallel, we must suppose the parent to be absent

from his child, — absent, let it be imagined, in a foreign country, and his child has never seen him. And now my supposition proceeds.

The child is told of this parent. But how told ? I will suppose it to be, with a manner always strange and constrained, with a countenance mysterious and forbidding, with a tone unusual and awful. Instead of being taught to lisp amidst his innocent prattlings, the name of *father*, to speak of that name as if there were a charm about it, to associate with the idea of that father, all brightness, benignity, and love ; instead of all this ease, simplicity, and tenderness, he is called away from his sports and pleasures, is made to stand erect and attentive, and then he is told of this father. He is told, indeed, that his father is good and loves him ; but the words fall lightly on his ear ; they make little or no impression on his mind, while the manner, the countenance, the tone, sink into his heart, and tell him far more effectually, that there is something strange and stern about this father, and that he cannot love such a being. Yet this is the very thing on which the main stress is laid. He is told that he must love his parent. He is constantly urged and commanded to love him. He is warned continually that his father will be very much displeased, if he does not love him. He is admonished that all the good things he enjoys were sent to him by his father ; and he is exhorted to be grateful. Besides, he is shown

a book — a fearful book, of laws, which this parent has written for him to obey. And to complete this system of influences, he has it continually held up before him, that, ere long, his father will send for him, and if he should find a defect of duty, gratitude, and love, he will cast him into a dismal prison, where he will be doomed to pass his whole remaining life in misery and despair!

I need not point out the moral of this comparison. Alas! how many *extraneous* causes have there been to sever the heart from its great native trust; the trust in an Infinite Parent! I say not this, to reproach any man, or any body of men. In this matter, I fear that we have all gone out of the way. I lament the defects of every kind of religious education and influence with which I am acquainted, and am persuaded that they have done much to spread around us the prevailing indifference and aversion to the most vital and vast of all concerns. I do not reproach my religious brethren then, who, with myself, I ought to believe, have meant well and erred in honesty, and whose attention I would invite, as I have given my own, to a serious consideration of this subject.

But I cannot leave the subject, without addressing one emphatic remonstrance to those with whom religion is a matter of indifference or dislike. I entreat such to distrust the influences under which they have come to that result. I am sure that I have said enough to show them, that

any subject would have failed to interest them under the same influences — the influences of neglect, of misconception, and of mistaken treatment. It is not the bright and glorious truth of heaven that is in fault. It is not your own nature that is in fault. It is not the beneficence of God that has been wanting to you. But human error has been flowing in all the streams of life around you ; and an erring heart within has too easily suffered petrification and death to steal into all its recesses. Oh ! let a new life be breathed there ; and you shall find that religion is no form, no irksome restraint, no dull compliance with duty merely, but spirit — but freedom — but life indeed ; life to your heart — the beginning of a higher life — of the life everlasting !

A DISCOURSE

ON LIBERALITY AND STRICTNESS.

GALATIANS V. 13. — FOR, BRETHREN, YE HAVE BEEN CALLED UNTO LIBERTY; ONLY USE NOT LIBERTY FOR AN OCCASION TO THE FLESH, BUT BY LOVE SERVE ONE ANOTHER.

HERE it would seem, in terms, at least, is something like contradiction. In the first place, the Apostle says, “ye have been called unto liberty,” and yet he adds in the same sentence, “but by love serve one another.” This might easily be shown, however, to be but one instance of a general principle; and of a principle which distinguishes true Christianity from all the corruptions of it, and from all false religions of whatever name. This is the principle of consistency or harmony in character. Christianity, as well as the character of its Founder, is distinguished by inculcating not one virtue or another to the exclusion of the rest, not by permitting any virtue to go to excess, but by the union and mutual control of opposite virtues. Such are fear and hope, meekness and courage, zeal and moderation, earnestness and calmness, gentleness and inflexibility, liberality and strictness.

The same apparent paradox that is contained in our text, we often meet with in reading the New-Testament. When I am weak, then am I strong, says the Apostle. And again, "blessed are they that mourn ; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; having nothing, yet possessing all things." So in the following passage ; " rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say rejoice. Let your *moderation* be known to all men."

Our text speaks of being free, and yet serving one another. This, we may observe, is the true doctrine with regard to civil liberty. This liberty, truly held, is not a boasting and blustering, nor a proud and self-sufficient, nor a reckless and licentious principle. It was not with such a spirit that our own independence was wrought out. I do not believe there ever were men who had a stricter regard to human rights, who were more cautious and prudent, who felt more deeply the trust they had taken upon themselves, who were more truly the servants of their country and mankind, than the free and noble spirits, that meditated and achieved the work of our national independence. Look at the body of men that framed and sealed the charter of our liberties. From the moment that they adopted this great declaration of rights, they were free. But did they then resign themselves to indulgence, and softness, and sloth ? No ; from that moment they were more devoted to their country, more

ready to serve one another, more assiduous and anxious, more burdened with a sense of responsibility, than ever. From that moment they acted like men, who had pledged "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor." This case, I conceive, may illustrate that view of religion, which I wish to explain and defend in the following discourse. These men, prudent, wise, great, and excellent as we know they were, in the eyes of their adversaries, were rash, rebellious, reckless of consequences, throwing off lawful allegiance, and plunging into anarchy and ruin. Long did the opposers of freedom wait for their halting, long have they waited to see the terrible results which they confidently predicted, and yet do these United States stand forth a practical refutation of their prophecies and protestations.

So it is, and so, I confidently believe, it will be in religious matters. It has fallen to the lot of religious liberty to meet with the same misrepresentations and the same misplaced admonitions, and it will, I doubt not, fall to the lot of its adversaries to meet with the same refutation.

The comparison holds, too, in another respect. Very likely there were, and are, among a free people, those who abuse their liberty, those who did not, and do not, perceive that the most free should be the most active, watchful, and guarded in the work of preserving their liberties; who did not, and do not, perceive that they who govern

themselves must be the most faithful, conscientious, and strict of all men. And very likely all this may apply to some persons in those communities that are most liberal and free in their religious sentiments.

You see, therefore, that I have a two-fold object in view ; — to defend liberal principles in religion, and to guard them from perversion. Indeed, I cannot help thinking, that there is a great deal of language relating to this subject, among ourselves, which is either wrong, or wrongly understood.

For instance ; I hear it said of a man that he is simplifying and spiritualizing religion too much. Now to this I would say, no ; he is doing it on a wrong principle. Strictly speaking, there cannot be too much simplifying and spiritualizing of religion. The language, I believe, is wrong, and I will hereafter undertake to show why. Again ; it is often said of one party in religion, that it is liberal, and of another, that it is strict. With regard to this language, I should say, it is true in a certain sense, and yet very liable to be wrongly and injuriously understood.

And the doctrine, which, for counteraction of these and some other mistakes, I assert, and maintain, to be accordant with the proper nature of things, and the true principles of Christianity, is this ; that true liberty in religion is naturally connected with moderation, sobriety, self-control, and

with the most intense devotion to the interests of others ; that true simplicity with regard to forms implies the justest veneration for all the useful institutions of piety and virtue ; and true liberality the most thorough strictness of conscience. You will not doubt that, according to the principles of Christianity, the meekest man is the most courageous, the holiest is the most humble, the most merciful man is truly the most just. So it is in regard to the cases which I have before stated. There is a perfect harmony in the qualities of a good character. They are all branches of one tree. There is no conflict in the attributes of true religion. In the strictest and highest sense, goodness is severe, and severity is good, mercy is just, and justice is merciful, gentleness is inflexible, and inflexibility is gentle. It is true, indeed, that this harmony is not always found in the imperfect characters of men, but this is what Christianity requires.

Let us now apply this general principle to some of the particulars before stated.

And first, let us refer to the case stated in the text — the subject, in other words, of Christian liberty. Does this imply licentiousness, or a reckless disregard of the feelings or interests of others ? Is the freedom of the Christian a principle of disorder, vice, or selfishness ? It is enough to ask this question. It needs no answer. Surely, freedom of conscience, the free toleration of all hon-

est opinions, the permission to every man to judge for himself, (as abstract doctrines, I say,) surely these do not bear an unfriendly aspect towards human interests. Neither are they licentious doctrines. This, indeed, was the great cry, at the Reformation, and whenever and wherever, since that time, the cause of Christian liberty has been advocated. But what is the fact? Have men grown more vicious as they have grown more free in sentiment? Is the Protestant portion of Christendom, the most corrupt part? It is enough, I say again, to ask this question. It is enough to refer to Spain, and Italy, and Russia, on the one hand, and to England, Germany, and North America on the other. Where is the Sabbath most strictly observed? Where have commenced the great moral reforms that signalize the present age? And where is the heaviest hand of restraint laid upon all the vices? It is in this freest country in the world!

This, moreover, is not the adventitious, but the natural result of the principles in question. The man, who thinks for himself, will not only be more intelligent, which is something to the purpose, but he will naturally be more solicitous and careful, than the man who suffers another to think for him, and to prescribe to him what he shall believe. The blind votary of an established creed or church, for instance, has nothing to do but to believe. He may be as dull and dead as a stock or a stone, which the

artificer frames and fits into the temple. Or if he rises one grade above this, to some slight degree of intellectual life and action, still the action in him is liable to be slavishly directed to one point ; the struggle in him is to believe ; the very principle of action in him is a slavish dread, and the dread all tends to the same point—it is a dread, lest he should disbelieve. But the man, who is free to think for himself, feels that he is put upon his own responsibility. If he errs, it is his own fault. He is more anxious, therefore, lest he should err.

He is anxious to know the truth. He girds up the loins of his mind, and is sober. He has come to the manhood of reason, and he puts on the sobriety of manhood. As the youth, when quitting the parental watch and care, when entering into life, and obliged to act for himself, receives from these circumstances a shade of thought and seriousness, so it is with the man who has left his ecclesiastical tutors and governors, and has gone forth into the wide world of knowledge, and is obliged to think for himself. He puts away the indifference and levity of his pupilage ; he becomes considerate and thoughtful ; he has cast from him the chains of superstition, indeed ; but he has put on instead the bonds of conscience, of moral responsibility.

What is thus naturally true of the manhood of a single life, is actually true of the manhood of the world. The world is more serious as it grows

older. Its pursuits are of a less trifling and frivolous character. Its pleasures are more intellectual. They are more refined; they have more of mind and sense, and of the proper object of recreation in them. We have orations now, instead of bull-fights to entertain the people, and grave processions, instead of mad tournaments. We do not crowd to see the deadly combat of gladiators; but those who did, so far from being more serious than we, could witness the death of a human being with more indifference than we the slaughter of a beast. — But I am wandering, perhaps, from the point. I will state, then, what *is* the point. Protestant Christendom is more sober than Catholic Christendom was, or is. It has fewer sports, and fetes, and holidays. There is more of thought in it, more of consideration, more of the intense and universal working of mind, more of the strict and minute discriminations of conscience. Some portions of Protestant Christendom, I am tempted to think, are *too* sober, and have too much eschewed and avoided reasonable and useful recreations.

Be this as it may, however; — what I would say is, that free principles, whether civil or religious, whether in an individual or the world, do not naturally tend to disorder and anarchy, to licentiousness, and vice, and frivolity. This has always been the charge which their adversaries have brought against them. But it is not true. The

true freeman, whether in Politics or Religion, is the best friend to a sober morality and a solemn piety, and to civil order and salutary government.

The man that is free, whether in Politics or Religion — the man that is free, paradox as it may seem, is the man that is most of all bound ; bound not by another, for then he would be a slave, but bound by himself. I see this man encompassed with bonds, and he wears them, not as rusting and galling fetters, but he wears them like a glorious vesture, or the mailed garments of the warrior ; — wears them both for ornament and defence. I see this man, the free man, encompassed with bonds, and he needs them to sustain and strengthen him. He stands up, erect and independent. He has taken his hand from the altar of superstition and from the throne of despotism ; he leans not on these frail and crumbling props of religious and political slavery. He must, therefore, I repeat, gird up the loins of his mind, and be sober. He must gird himself in the armor of principle and conscience. No man has so much need to do this. No man is so likely to feel this necessity.

This, let me add, is precisely the doctrine which I wish to maintain. I do not say that every man, who is free, is therefore wiser and better than other men. So general a proposition is more than could be maintained in any practical question or controversy about the human character. I do not deny, that in religion some men have used liberty

for an occasion to the flesh ; that some have perverted their liberty of thought into haughtiness and contempt of others, and their liberty of action into a neglect of the rights and interests of others : but I say that these are perversions of a good principle — of a principle more likely to contribute, and actually contributing more, to good than to evil. I maintain only, that the freest principles are the most generous and benevolent, the most pure and useful, the most temperate and sober, and, in fine, the most faithful and obedient to all the calls of religion and virtue.

Now let us turn for a moment. to the subject of *Christian simplicity*. I use this term here as opposite to a zeal about forms in religion. This zeal has undoubtedly declined in modern times. Simplicity has advanced. Men are less concerned about the forms, and more about the spirit of devotion. This unavoidably results from the progress of knowledge and refinement. Anciently men's religion necessarily partook very much of a ritual character. In a rude state of society, many forms are needed to impress religion. It was, in part, for the purpose of meeting this necessity, that the Jewish ritual was ordained. As the mind advances, it enters more into the real nature and spirit of religion.

This is the general statement, which we are accustomed to hear made on the comparative character and the contrasted progress of a spiritual,

and a ceremonial piety. And from this is inferred the danger of sweeping away entirely, together with the frivolous and burdensome, the wholesome and needful formalities of religion. It is feared, by some, that this change is tending to a general indifference about all religious institutions. Men are liable, it is said, to refine and simplify too much. Now I have ventured to call this language in question. I say first, not too much, but on a wrong principle. And I say, secondly, that on the true principle there cannot be too much. — Not too much, but on a wrong principle. For instance, a man may determine to give up every form, for which he cannot find an express command in the New Testament. This is a wrong principle. The New Testament does not propose to assign all the forms in which men shall worship. There is nothing like a complete system of Church government, discipline, or worship, to be found in it. Men are left, in the general, to adopt such forms as they may find expedient. It is unquestionably expedient that there be a certain number of forms, greater or less, according to the state of society or the experience of individuals.

But this leads me to another observation. A man may hastily adopt the principle, that the fewer forms there are in the world, the better. *This* is wrong. It is not reasoning, but visionary nonsense. There are forms in everything — forms in friendship, forms in society, forms in business, and

why should there not be forms in religion? I cannot say to what state the world may arrive. I cannot say, but it will become so honest that there will be no need of pledges, of bonds and notes of hand, or so religious, that it will need no forms; but I am certain that the time has not yet come. If there be any individuals of so spiritual and exalted a mind, that they need no forms, I pretend not to interfere with their secret conscience; but this, at least, is certain, that their religion must be peculiar to themselves; it is not suitable for the multitude; it is not made for this age, nor for the busy throng of this world's cares.

Let us now refer to the other point stated. Of a true spirituality or simplicity there cannot be too much. On the contrary, the more there is of it in any man's experience, the more deeply will he be interested in the forms that he does use: the more attached he is to the spirit of religion, the more he is to the means that appear to him to nourish it. For what is this spirituality, this process of simplifying? It is to separate vital religion from the things that do not belong to it, to penetrate more and more deeply into the very nature, the heart and soul of piety, to come nearer and nearer to the great Being who is its object — nearer and nearer to the great reality. It is a growing and more sensitive fear of all forms of godliness, which are without the power, it is an increasing horror of the mockery of unreal worship, it is a

more and more profound reverence for God. I believe there is nothing like the tenderness of feeling, the sensitiveness of conscience, the deep, and unfeigned, and unspeakable awe, which a man of true and growing spirituality and simplicity cherishes. And does it belong to such a man to be indifferent about forms? No; in truth, no man so deeply feels their sacredness. And of all those, that he thinks proper and useful, no man so deeply feels the value. He may not think of this and that form as another does. He may judge of one or another, that it is not fitted to promote his devotion. He may feel that it stands in the way; and feeling that he must answer to God rather than to men, he may dispense with that form. He may do it from very tenderness of conscience. He fears to *tread*, where other men rush in with reckless and inconsiderate haste.

This, surely, is not the man to accuse of an indifference about forms. He is not indifferent to *any* forms. He feels more concerning those he *disuses*, than many who use them. He feels most of all about those which commend themselves to his judgment and conscience.

Look at this subject upon a large scale. Are forms more negligently observed in the modern world than they were in the ancient? Is the Protestant more indifferent to the rites and institutions of religion, than the Catholic? Without wishing to be uncharitable, I confidently say, no;

but the very reverse. The simple services of prayer and meditation in our Protestant churches, though too dull as I feel, and painfully feel that they are, are, nevertheless, not so smitten with the deadly taint of formality, as have been the masses, the genuflexions, the sprinklings of water and burning of incense, in the Catholic ritual. There is a medium somewhere ; and rites must not be burdensome, nor unmeaning, nor barely decent or imposing, to take a deep hold of the heart.

It remains to speak, in the third place, of *liberality and strictness*, and the length to which the previous discussions have run, will oblige me to do so very briefly ; and I the more willingly submit to this restriction, because some of the topics, that might be embraced under this head, have already been considered under that of religious liberty. There is, however, a difference. A man may be free in his religious opinions ; he may be under no restraint, and yet his mind may not qualify him to be liberal. This state of mind implies a range of observation, an extent of reflection, a discrimination of the relative value and importance of different truths and duties, a wide and comprehensive survey of the objects of life, which suppose not only freedom, but some enlargement of mind. Liberty is, indeed, the very soil of liberality ; but that liberality will have expanded, and grown more or less, according to the degree of mental culture. A liberal man dis-

criminate. He sees fewer opinions to be essential to character, than another. He sees goodness under every form of religion. He is not bound by any system of technical and scholastic theology. You know, perfectly well, what is meant by a liberal physician, a liberal jurist, a liberal merchant, or artist, or artisan. He sees into the principles of things, and is not blindly attached to one mode of practice, to one set of technical forms, or to one way of proceeding in the business of life. So it is with the liberal Christian. He will take a wide range in his views. He will think of religion, as he thinks of other subjects. He will discriminate the principles from the forms of things. He will no more require a man to be religious after one particular and set fashion, than he will require a man to be honest, or industrious, or intelligent after one particular and set fashion. He will provide, in his system of religion, for the liberal expansion of all the principles and powers of human nature. He will not strive to eradicate the native affections, but to cultivate them. He will speak in its accordant tone to every feeling, to fear and hope, to joy and sorrow. He will instruct, he will warn, he will encourage, he will soothe. He will feel that man was made to be a noble creature, and he will strive to build up in him the noble proportions of a glorious and lovely character. I am speaking now of no party nor sect. I have known liberal men of all parties. I have known illiberal men of all parties.

And now I ask, must such a man be less strict in conscience for his liberality? If he must, I ask, why? His liberality relates chiefly to opinions, and modes of religious impression; his conscience relates to duties. But if you say, he is more liberal in his view of *duties*, that he does not account all those things to be duties, which you do; still I answer, he may be just as strict about those things that he does account to be duties. Let us particularize. You say he is more liberal in his ideas of what are to be considered as proper recreations; he does things that you would not do; he goes where you would not go. But does it follow that his conscience is any less strict about those pleasures which he does hold to be wrong? Does he, any less than another man, condemn gambling, intemperance, and sensuality in all their forms? I appeal to facts. Is it in the liberal communities of this, or any other country, that profaneness, debauchery, gaming, most prevail?

But let us take our objector himself to task. Here is a man, who condemns things you approve. He says that you must not be amused with a show, or with wit. He says that you must not laugh — that you must not drink your neighbor's health, or that you must not eat flesh on Friday. Do you allow that this man has a stricter conscience than you? By no means; you say that his conscience relates to different things — to things that, in your

view, are innocent. Very true; and out of thine own mouth thou art answered.

But I am not content with answer. I go farther, and maintain, that the liberal man is more likely to be truly and rationally strict. He thinks more and more freely. He takes a wider view of the relations of things and persons. He is strict in many cases, where another man is not strict; and cases far more important, too, than avoiding an amusement, or attending meetings. He is more likely to be strict in a meek and charitable judgment of the piety and virtue of his neighbor. He is more likely, also, from his liberality, to be strict in the duty of being agreeable, and kind to those around him, and in the endeavor to promote their happiness; to be strict in the delicate relations of private and domestic life. He is more likely to be strict in the virtues of modesty and self-distrust, of gentleness and forbearance. And for this reason: *in proportion as any man lays too much stress on unessential things, does he take it off from things that are essential.* If a man makes too much of doctrines, in just that proportion will he make too little of virtues. If he thinks, more than he ought, that his salvation depends on going to meetings, he will think less than he ought of his temper and behavior at home. If he makes too much merit of abstaining from an amusement, he will make too little merit of abstaining from harsh reflections on those who

avail themselves of it. What does the history of all religion more clearly show, than this? It was when our Puritan fathers could not endure that any man should have long hair, that their conscience was clear for persecuting the Quakers. It is where the ritual of the Romish Church is carried to the greatest length, and observed in every iota, that the virtues of private life are brought into the most serious doubt and danger.

In fine, true liberality and true strictness are things that naturally go together. And so do true spirituality and a true reverence for religious institutions. And the same connexion holds between a pure religious freedom, and the most solemn obligation. No one is so much bound, no one ought to be so strict, no one owes so much gratitude and reverence to the means of religion, as the free, spiritual, liberal man. No one, I repeat, is so likely to feel all this.

In one word, all the qualities of a right and good character, will coalesce and blend into perfect harmony. This is true religion: this is Christianity. Where, or whom, this truth cuts, I cannot pause with any fastidious delicacy to inquire. If our liberality is laxness, if our spirituality is that sort of visionary and irrational speculation, which holds itself to be released from all forms for which there is no verbal command, if our liberty is turned into indulgence, and because there is no church power to threaten us, we feel no

fear; then have these boasted qualities of ours a better name than they deserve: then, like the superficial world, are we deceived, and misled with names. Religion is reality; all else is shadow. It penetrates the heart; it dwells there; it is there, the freest, the simplest, the most liberal, but yet the most blessed and cherished, of all things. Without any power but its own power, it moulds and fashions, it subdues and softens, it comforts us, it fills us with joy. It is dearer than a right hand or a right eye; it is deeper in the soul than all the fountains of pleasure; it is stronger than all the impulses of passion. Of such a thing, a good man will not make an excuse, nor a pretension, nor a form, nor a name. No: oh! no. Heaven is not higher than his aspiration after purity. Hell is not so dreadful as the sin he fears. The universe is not so wide as the expansion of his immeasurable desires, and his immortal hope.

A DISCOURSE

ON MODERATION.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 5.—LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN TO
ALL MEN.

No virtue, no one of the Christian graces exists in perfection, unless it is modified and controlled by some other virtue or grace. The measure, the test, the utmost effort, the last finishing touch of the truest excellence, is to be found only in perfect moderation.

The soul is capable of a various action; or, in popular language, it is composed of various faculties. If one of these faculties were to absorb all the rest, if one kind of action were to take place of all others, the result would be, not a soul with the fair proportion in which God made it, but a monstrous deformity of the soul. As with the faculties, so it is with the virtues of the mind. Were any one, however excellent, to swallow up all the rest, it would not be a virtue, but an excess, an excrescence, a deformity. The plant, the tree, or the organized body, where one secretion, one branch, or one limb, should absorb all the vital

juices and energies to the withering and decay of every other part, would present a just picture of such moral deformity.

That true proportion of the virtues, which I shall attempt to illustrate in this discourse, has never been perfectly exhibited on earth, but in ONE EXAMPLE. The most vaunted models of human excellence have too often been but the splendid excesses of ambition, genius, or learning. And, indeed, the most remarkable piety and philanthropy have often owed their celebrity, in a degree, to their extravagance. In short, some power or passion of the mind, disproportionately developed and exalted to an undue prominence, makes what is often denominated a great man, or a great Christian ; but a man, a Christian, nevertheless, of great faults. The passion, that has shot up into a luxuriant growth, has overshadowed other passions, and taken away that strength of the soil, by which they also should have grown. Thus, in the pride of talents, some men have neglected humble acquisitions and offices. Under the impulse of genius others have become wayward, extravagant, irritable, and useless. In the fervor and joy of the social affections, many have forgotten their Maker. In the zeal of philanthropy, men are liable to overrate particular objects, and censoriously to condemn those who do not go along with them. In the confidence of piety not a few have seemed to forget the rights and feelings of society around

them. There has never been on earth but one perfect example.

Nay, this state of things, though resulting from human infirmity, not only exhibits many errors, but it has tended to set up maxims of error. The real nature of some virtues, and the proper union of others, are lost sight of, in the common estimates of character. The ancient mistakes, — by which meekness was confounded with meanness, and humility with debasement of spirit, — are not yet done away. We do not look for great things from mildness and calmness, and yet these are ingredients of true power — these are characteristics of the power that is Almighty. We do not yet understand that the mightiest principle in the universe, that which exercises the most sovereign control over rational beings, is kindness. We do not yet understand that pride and courage, in the ordinary sense of these terms, are the most poor-spirited things in the world.

The age full of that crude earnestness, which is called excitement, the time full of religious dispute, the world full of zealots and partisans, is not yet prepared to understand the truth, the well-proportioned, the simple and sublime truth. If a man is called zealous, no one can think of him as being calm. If he is said to be serious, it does not occur to us, that he may be cheerful. If he is meek, then he is not accounted to be resolute ; if gentle, then not inflexible ; if sound and staid in

judgment, then not ardent in feeling. And, indeed, these estimates, it must be confessed, arise from the ordinary and prevailing forms of character around us, though they take for granted an absolute incompatibility of qualities in the character which is not true.

It is desirable, then, to bestow some attention upon a subject so much misapprehended. It is desirable for the purpose of setting up a just standard in our own minds, — it is desirable for our own improvement, that we should consider the entire compatibility in a perfect character of all the qualities that form it — the entire compatibility and harmony of those qualities which appear to be the most opposite and irreconcilable.

In the discussion of this point, I anticipate that a part of our labor will consist in connecting, to some extent, new and unusual ideas, with old and ordinary terms. This, however, is not the work of captious criticism. It necessarily results from every step in the improvement of our moral theories and religious conceptions, that we should attach better and brighter ideas to common words. For the want of this improvement, for the want of these lofty conceptions, for the want of a deep religious experience, many of the words, that are commonly applied to religious and moral subjects, are, to most persons, dull words. Show me a people where the words virtue, piety, God, and heaven, mean all that they should mean, and you

will give me the strongest possible proofs of the spiritual improvement of that people.

But it is time that I proceed to some details, which may better illustrate the principle for which I contend.

The precept of our text requires *môderation*. It may serve to show how familiar to the apostle's mind was this compatibility of opposite qualities for which I contend, to observe that the exhortation which immediately precedes our precept is one of a very fervent character — one, indeed, which our precept seems evidently introduced to control and modify. Rejoice in the Lord always, is the exhortation — and again I say rejoice. Let your moderation, this is the controlling principle — let your moderation be known to all men. But is the moderation designed to lessen the joy? Is it designed to restrain the true, legitimate, sacred joy? By no means. Rejoice always, and again I say rejoice; but give not way to a wild, tumultuous, inconsiderate extasy. And why? Because a wild, tumultuous, inconsiderate extasy is not the real, rational, strong, and steadfast rejoicing. True joy is the offspring of thought. Deep joy is ever mixed with deep reflection. When it goes to excess, it becomes a weak, shallow, animal fervor. It is “a sober certainty of bliss” which religion offers to its votaries. It is a strong, deep, soul-sufficing joy. This is not inconsistent with moderation. This implies moderation.

But now let us consider more particularly what moderation is. It is opposed, not to excess of joy, only, but to excess of all kinds. What, then, is moderation? It is commonly considered as a very tame quality. A man of great moderation is judicious, sound, discreet; but not a man of lofty gifts and powerful energies. This is the common language; but I deny that the common language accords with the true theory of moral and intellectual greatness. What, then, I ask again, is moderation, in its loftiest character? It is self-control. It will indeed be a higher or lower virtue, according to the weakness, or strength of the mind in which it dwells: according to the powers it has to master. But it is the mastery over all. It is the strong self-control of the most powerful and impassioned minds, of the most fervent, glowing, energetic spirits.

It is, indeed, an essential quality of true genius, of true sensibility, of true religion. It is, I am inclined to think, the precise quality which distinguishes the loftiest forms of these several characters, from all inferior forms. Genius, without it, is wild; sensibility, wayward; religion, extravagant. It is the control of all impulse, energy, feeling, passion, and thought. It must then be a powerful principle. It brings all the elements of the soul into harmony; it binds all; it is the key stone of the arch; it is the crown of glory upon the radiant, but calm and "even brow" of virtue.

Let us now refer to other qualities. Meekness, gentleness, and humility are commonly opposed to courage, inflexibility, and loftiness of character. And the unfortunate result — for I must keep in view the moral purpose of these inquiries — the unfortunate result is, that the man, who would form a high, resolute, and daring character, thinks it necessary to lay aside the meekness, gentleness, and humility of the Christian temper. The youth, whose mind is glowing with ambition and hope, whose imagination is kindling at ideal excellence, whose spirit scorns everything that is not lofty and glorious, too seldom embodies in his visions, the virtues of humility, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness.

And yet the virtues which are thus despised, which the world generally holds in such low esteem, which those teachers of the educated world, the ancient philosophers, poets, and historians, have branded as mean and abject — those very virtues, I say, are the loftiest forms of that excellence which men profess to admire and seek. They are emphatically the Christian forms of excellence. Meekness, for instance, is the noblest form of true courage. For, what is it? It is to offer to him, that smiteth on the one cheek, the other also. It is to see the scornful action, or to hear the slighting word, with a calm dignity and self-possession, that disprove the implication and disarm the affront. It is to rise above the

opinion of the multitude, and to refer one's self to the judgment of God. And that is a courage of which the duelist, the avenger of himself, the angry defender of his honor, the man who flies into a passion at every insult, knows nothing. But meekness is a still more comprehensive virtue. It is not only courage, but it may be pity, and gentleness of heart, that will not be angry, and sad, and mournful, but lofty reflection on human strifes, as if it dwelt in an angel's bosom; and more than all, it may be a noble homage to truth. For, suppose the strongest case, or that which is usually accounted the strongest. Suppose that your understanding is impeached. Suppose that you are called an ordinary man, a poor scholar, a dull genius, an ordinary man in your profession or occupation. If it is not true, it were nobler in you, certainly, to hear all this, with a calm consciousness of its injustice, than hastily to resent it. But if it is true, how much nobler still, how rare and almost unheard of a nobleness would it be, simply and modestly to acknowledge the truth! Nay, how entirely would that acknowledgment, in a respect far more material than that of any technical acquisition, disprove the charge! How completely would it show that you are not an ordinary man — that you are farthest in the world from being an ordinary man! Would that be an ordinary virtue? I say that the world, with all its pride and pretension, might be safely challenged to meet

you in that trying controversy, which is every day deciding on the characters of men. And you might safely say to the ambitious and haughty world, if that were your disposition, "I am superior to you all."

It would be easy, if it were necessary, to carry out the same parallel in favor of the other virtues, which I have included under this head of my discourse. The most inflexible resolution, may dwell, and often has dwelt, in the bosom of perfect gentleness ; nay, and eminently of the gentler sex. On this subject, I doubt whether the author of the celebrated Essay on Decision of Character had arrived to the loftiest conception of that quality. My objection is not simply, that he chose such a large proportion of his examples at the greatest distance from the Christian school, but that he has wrought into this inflexible decision of character, which he so powerfully describes, qualities of sternness and stoicism, that, in its most perfect form, do not belong to it. Where was there ever more inflexibility of purpose, more uncompromising individuality of aim, more noble decision of character, than in our Great Example ? And yet where was there ever such gentleness ?

Humility, again, I believe, it is no paradox to say, is the truest loftiness of character. For, what is humility ? It is an unfeigned acknowledgment to ourselves, and to others, if need be, of our faults, mistakes, errors, and sins. And what is

this, but a homage to truth, at the expense of our own pride, self-esteem, ease, and almost every cherished passion of the ordinary and worldly mind? That homage is called humility; but it is, indeed, the loftiest homage that man can pay to truth, to virtue, and to God! It is the love of all these — it is the love of everything glorious and excellent, forcing its way through all the barriers that the evil heart can set up to oppose it.

But I wish to carry this discussion, before I leave it, into a more palpable application to the forms and maxims of virtue and piety that prevail around us. Men find in themselves a certain temperament, a certain tone of sensibility, a certain peculiarity of mind and feeling, and they are liable to give themselves up to it, to consider it as their destiny to be thus and so, instead of laying upon those tendencies the due restraint. Thus a man says, "my temperament is nervous and excitable; my feelings are quick and vehement; nature has poured a fiery tide into my veins; and how can I be expected to walk in the staid and regular steps of other men? I am a being of impulse; do not ask of me to be reasonable and moderate. I must follow my bias; I cannot fight against nature. I am liable to be irritated — to be passionate. Do not mind it; it is my way." Now granting the premises; what is the conclusion? The very reverse, I answer, of what he draws from them. He, of all men, should think

about restraint — should bind upon his conscience the duty of moderation. Because his passions are strong, is that a reason for throwing up the reins to them ?

So a man says, “my firmness is very great, and it often becomes obstinacy. No man can be everything, he says, and I am that sort of man.” But that is the very reason why he should strive to be another sort of man too. His very business is, not to give himself up to this tendency, but to control it by gentleness, by questioning himself patiently, by listening to the arguments of others. And especially is it to be learnt in both instances, that there is no inconsistency between strength and calmness of feeling, between decision and gentleness in the character.

Let us now apply the same observation to some of the prevailing forms of religious character. Here, too, there are continual mistakes. For instance, when it is said to any one, “you belong to the liberal class of Christians,” he is liable to suppose, from the imagined incompatibility of liberality with strictness, that he is not to be in any sense strict. What strict people do is no concern of his ; he is a liberal Christian. And he is thus liable to cut himself off not only from what is good in the good examples of others, but from what belongs to the fair proportion of a good character. Again, another says, “I have the idea that religion is a cheerful thing ; I have no belief

in a lengthened visage, or a solemn manner, or in abstinence from cheerful recreations." And he may talk in this way to the injury of his more serious convictions. He may indulge in these views, and in this kind of conversation, till he feels far less than he should, or than he otherwise might, how serious, how solemn, how infinitely solemn an interest religion is. And so, on the other hand, a man, by taking to himself, too exclusively, the character of great and peculiar seriousness, by often saying that he, for his part, is strict and solemn, and that he is willing it should be known that he takes that ground, and by feeling, perhaps, some pride in being singular and stoical with regard to the pleasures of this life—such an one, I say, will be less likely to give the virtues of cheerfulness and agreeableness the place in religion that they deserve.

Now the proper answer to these several views is, that there is no incongruity between the various qualities to which they relate. We know, as a matter of common observation, that excessive mirth in an individual is no proof that he is constantly, or even ordinarily, light-hearted and thoughtless. Nay, some of the most melancholy men, that I have ever known, have been remarkable for an occasional and extreme gayety of spirits. This, however, is not the true proportion and habit of a well-balanced and good mind. In such a mind, seriousness and cheerfulness do not dwell

by turns, but they dwell together : and they dwell together without any effort being necessary to reconcile them. There is no war between them. The true and best cheerfulness is a serious feeling ; and the true and right seriousness, is a cheerful feeling. Deep joy is the most serious of all feelings, and is often testified by tears. And the deepest seriousness, the most profound awe, that which arises from the fixed and absorbing contemplation of God, is a feeling of overpowering joy.

In fine, let me observe, that the truest piety, the truest virtue, not only thus embraces, harmonizes, and moderates all the qualities that belong to it, but that it has no more remarkable characteristic, than this very moderation of which I have been speaking. In deep and heartfelt goodness, in thorough principle, it seems to me, that there is a certain staidness and sobriety, an unostentatious quietness, a calm assurance of its own reality, and a conscious dignity, appearing sometimes almost like reserve — not hasty, nor forward, nor loud, nor strong in its expressions. It is a more imperfect and doubtful virtue, that speaks extravagantly, both about virtue and vice. And yet, when the more settled, calm, and assured virtue does speak, it is with that tone of reality, and sincerity, which carries more weight and power with it, than all the declamations of artificial earnestness and mis-giving zeal.

Let me add, that the topic, on which I have

now addressed you, seems to me most emphatically appropriate to the times. Not that we have too much zeal ; not that we have too much enterprise ; not that we have too much excitement, did each of these possess the right character. To obtain this, we have to advance farther, not to fall back. There is nothing, of which a high example it now more needed, than true moderation — than a quiet, resolved, self-subsistent virtue — than a virtue which is a principle, and not a paroxysm, a growth *in* a man, and not an excrescence upon him — a virtue which is strong enough to be calm, self-assured enough to be unostentatious, habitual enough to be easy and spontaneous — a virtue, whose greatness has the charm of humility, whose decision the beauty of gentleness, and whose courage the glory of meekness.

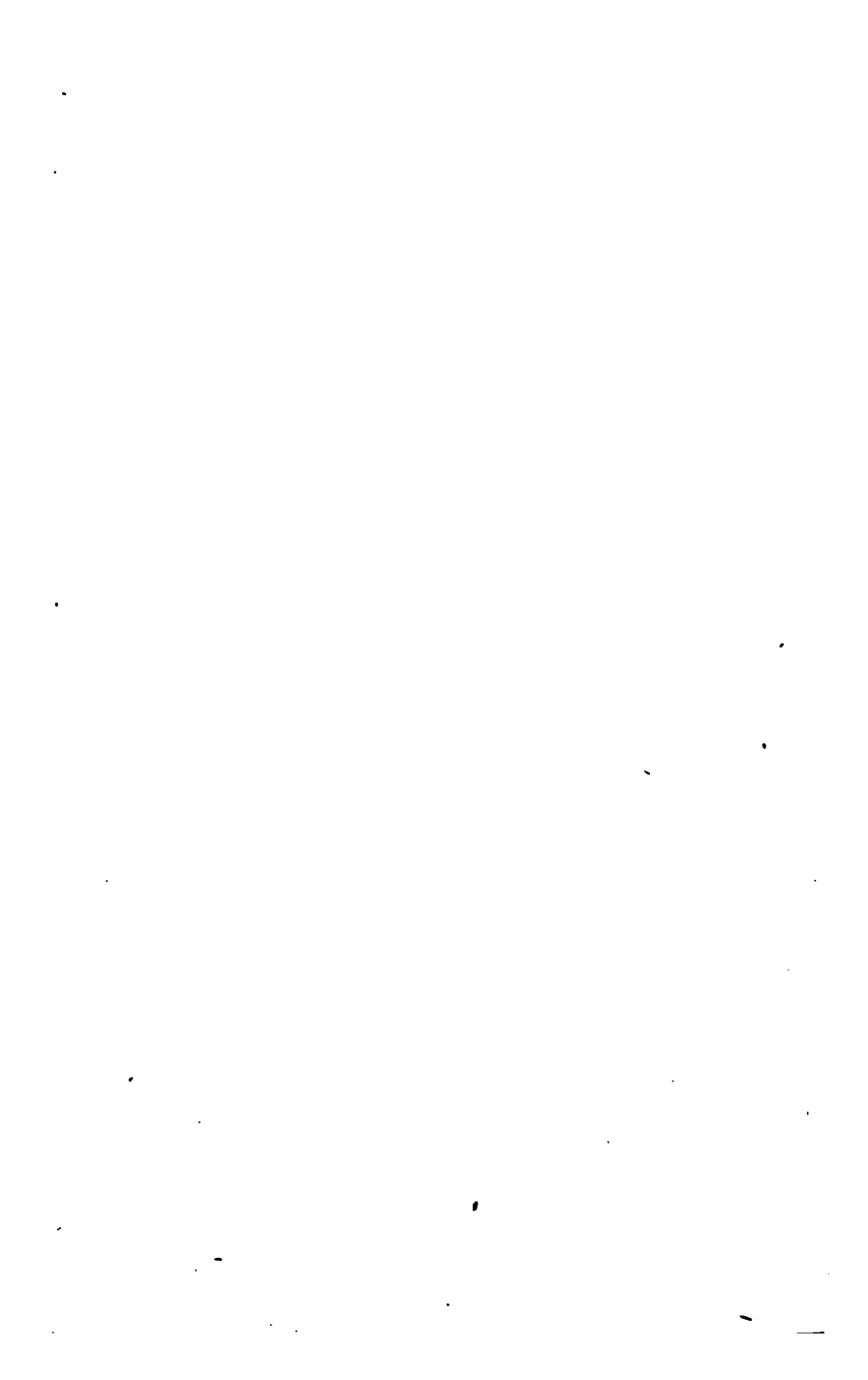
And such, indeed, in the representations of poets, at least, was the virtue of the old chivalry ; and the ideal of virtue in that age seems, in this respect, to be higher than our own. The true-hearted knight of the minstrel's tale was always courteous, modest, and even meek. The romance of those days had caught a spark from the primeval Christian altars.

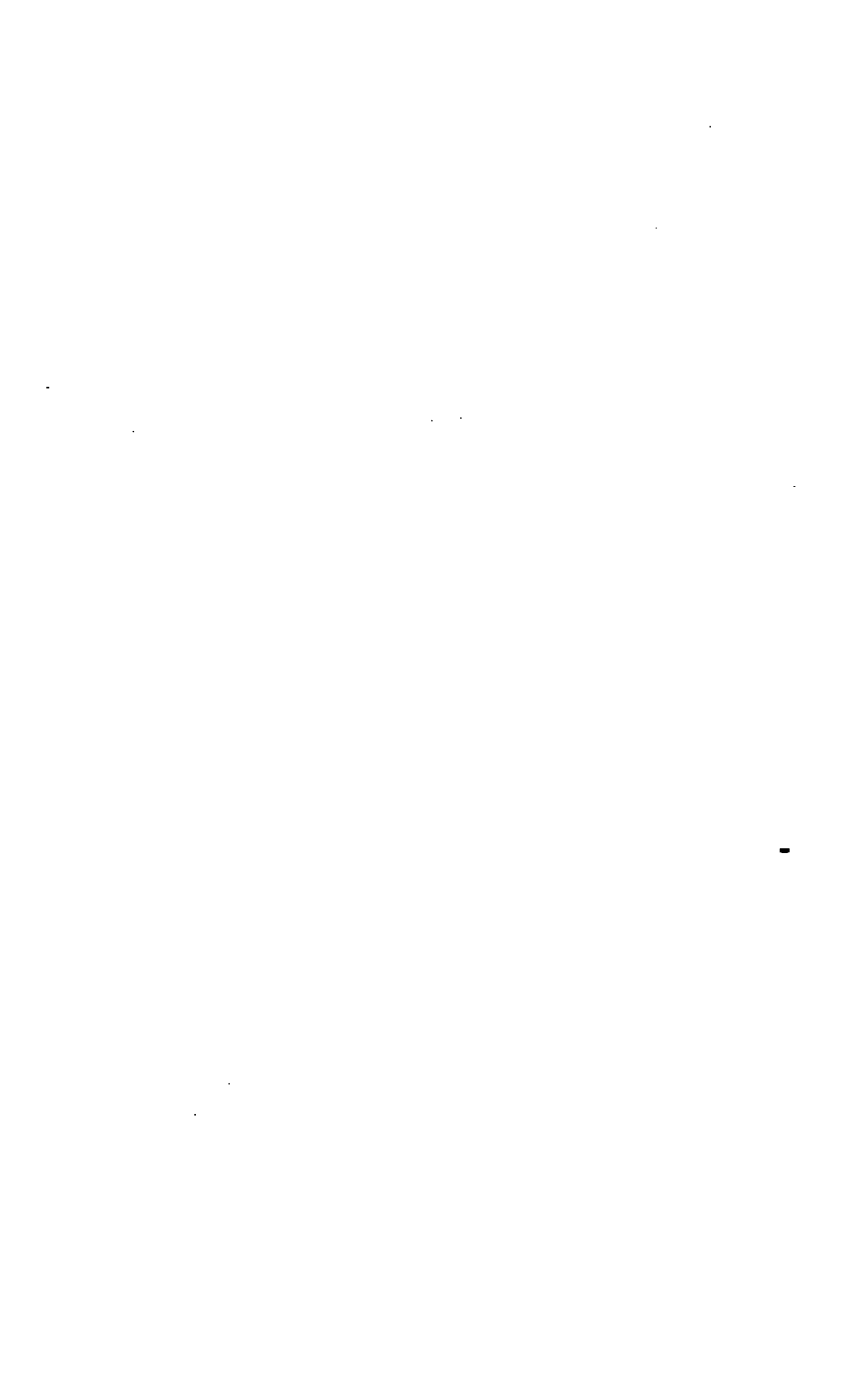
But why should I speak of that faint and faded light, when the great example itself is before us in all its splendor. And most needful, indeed, is that example. For such is the infirmity of men's minds, that if it were not for one perfect exam-

ple, we might almost have doubted the possibility of that complete harmony of opposite qualities in the character, for which I have contended. But in Him, who is set forth as pattern, prince, and lord in the moral creation, there was nothing wanting, and there was nothing in excess. There was no conflict, no clashing in the qualities of his perfect character. I say not that he was grave, *but* cheerful. I conceive of a more perfect union. He was grave **AND** cheerful at the same moment, and in the same act. The thought, the affection, the act of the soul, that was serious, that very act was cheerful. This was the tenor, the habit, the harmony, of his perfect mind. Perfect in himself, patient with others ; sublime in purpose, simple in manners ; superior to all, the servant of all ; he dwelt among his disciples as Master, Teacher, Counsellor, Companion, Friend. Courageous to meet opposition, meek to endure injury ; immovable in his design, gentle in the fulfilment of it ; glorious, as the Son of God, humble as the Son of Man ; he walked among the degraded, the blaspheming, the captious, and the hostile, to blame, yet to pity them ; to resist, yet to raise them ; to sacrifice to them his life, to overcome them by his death. He was not courageous at one time, and meek at another ; but his very courage was meek ; his very inflexibility was gentle ; his very glory and loftiness was that of a humble and filial reverence to his Father. Won-

derful Being! worthy to be the Saviour of men! When shall the world understand thee? when shall it admire, love, follow thee, as it ought?

Christian! this is your perfection — far off from us, as yet, but it is for this that you must strive. Christian! if thou deservest the name, put away from thee all waywardness, all extravagance, all excess, all rashness, all uncontrollable passion. “Thou, O man of God! flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.”





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